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By B H Raheem (October 1991) in remembrance of the enforced exodus of Muslims from northern Sri Lanka in October 1990

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CONTENTS

Let the Musllims go home	03
News Review	04
Pressure Mounts for Peace	08
Turning Point in the Conflict	10
The Dispossessed Muslims	13
Peace Alliance	15
Hazards of Making Peace	17
Turning the Tide	21
Assertion of Humanity	24
Sangh Parivar Bares its Fangs	26
Prof.S. Arasaratnam	27
Book Review	28
Classified	30

LET THE MUSLIMS GO HOME

This October marked the eighth anniversary of the enforced exodus of the Muslim population from Sri Lanka's northern districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. On 22 October 1990, tragedy struck these defenceless people, who had lived in these areas for centuries, when they were ordered by the LTTE to immediately leave their homes and worldly possessions and quit the land of their birth. To the victims of this diktat, it was like a lethal thunderbolt that hit them instantaneously. It hit them without warning or notice. They never imagined that such a draconian and unconscionable prospect would visit them for they had done no wrong even in their wildest dreams to displease the promulgators of the diktat.

In Jaffna, they were given just two hours to pack up and quit. Quit they did and over 75,000 Muslims, men and women, old and the young, became dispossessed and displaced overnight. Innocent and defenceless thousands of Muslim civilians in lorries, tractors and bullock-carts waded their way through mud and rain to beat the deadline set for their evacuation.

One had never before witnessed, even taking account of the not infrequent communal pogroms mainly directed at the island's minority Tamil population in recent decades, such an outrage of ethnic cleansing which was carried out in the most cold and clinical fashion that only those with the required ideological disposition and organisational capability could have carried it out.

But the sad commentary to this tragedy is that, out of fear or favour, the majority of the Tamils including their so-called intellectuals and religious leaders did not raise their voice in protest against the dispossession and displacement of the entirety of the Muslim civilian population of the north. They remained silent spectators or willing accomplices in the enacting of this grievous crime against a defenceless people.

October 1998 also marked another "Exodus" - the third anniversary of the enforced evacuation of almost the entire population of the Jaffna peninsula for it was in October 1995 nearly 800,000 Tamil civilians were directed by diktat to leave their homes and go out of the peninsula and into the areas of the jungle areas of the Vanni. In considering the plight the Tamils of Jaffna faced in October 1995, one is reminded of what Pastor Niemoeller, a victim of the Holocaust, said in his often repeated quotation:

> " First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out - because I was not a Jew;
> Then they came for the communists, and I did not speak out - because I was not a communist;
> Next they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out - because I was not a trade unionist;
> Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me."

The displaced and dispossessed Muslims have been living as refugees in 66 camps scattered throughout the Puttalam district and adjoining areas for the last eight years. They have become a forgotten and voiceless people undergoing unendurable hardship. These people have no where else to go. They have neither the money or the inclination to seek refuge abroad. Their one and only objective in life is they want to return to their homes from which they were driven out. They have not forgotten what happened to them in October 1990. But they are willing to forgive and forget and return to their homes. Their plea is; "We Want to Go Home".

The Northern Muslim Refugee Organisation, which represents the majority of these refugees have taken up their cause. According to the NMRO, the Muslim refugees want to return to their homes with the consent of the LTTE leadership to whom several letters had been sent. Month after month, year after year, these people wait for a word from the LTTE leadership stating that it has no objection to them returning to their homes.

In the history of the Tamil struggle for the restoration of their legitimate rights, the ignoble and inhuman act of enforced evacuation and dispossession of the Muslim people in October 1990 would constitute an ugly indelible blot. The time has come for mitigation. Let the Muslim people return to their homes.

NEWS REVIEW

October 1998 began inauspiciously, counting the dead from the battles at Mankulam and Kilinochchi. The final death toll was clearly above 1500 on the side of the Sri Lankan security forces while the LTTE too is estimated to have lost close upon 1000 of its cadre. The confusion created by Defence Ministry sources regarding the actual numbers of those killed in the clashes led to a growing resentment regarding censorship of news regarding the war.

On October 2, the Free Media Movement issued a statement calling on all responsible journalists to publish whatever information they could gather on the war situation, in defiance of the censorship.

On the part of the Sri Lankan government, the loss of the Paranthan-Kilinochchi Base camp at such a hea vy cost of lives and equipment led to a serious re-assessment of military and defence strategy with the President herself taking the lead in this review, as Minister of Defence. A Court of Inquiry headed by Major General Sathis Jayasundera was appointed to look into lapses in military intelligence which were at least partly to blame for what is now being commonly referred to as the 'Kilinochchi debacle'.

While prospects of peace remained as distant as ever, with the UNP and the government continuing hostilities, a surprise 'actor' entered the fray in mid-October. A consortium of several key Sri Lankan business federations came out with a ten-point programme for peace and prosperity and organised an all-party dialogue on these issues. Following intensive discussion with the UNP and the PA, the business community announced that they had decided to prioritise the peace issue as being key to every other point on their agenda. This initiative has been viewed by many observers as being one of the most radical with regard to peace agendas in Sri Lanka in recent times.

The surprise release of 6 servicemen and 3 crew members of the 'Irish Moana' and the 'Missen' without any conditions being laid down by the LTTE led to a new round of speculation about the readiness of the LTTE to resume some form of contact with the government. There have also been comments made by political observers regarding the interventions of intermediaries from South Africa aimed at bringing the two parties to the Sri Lankan conflict closer to the negotiating table.

Within the UNP, the clash between current leader Wickremasinghe and Premadasa confidante Sirisena Cooray came out into the open when Cooray appealed to his audience at a public meeting in Colombo to 'challenge' the leadership of the UNP. Cooray reiterated that he would run for President when the opportunity arose. In the meanwhile, following the Kilinochchi debacle and the President's assumption of a key role in reviewing military strategy, the 'hawks' and 'doves' within the PA and within the SLFP in particular have become more polarised. Attacks on UNP meetings and supporters were reported from several parts of the island.

A team from Amnesty International made a two-week visit to Sri Lanka in the first half of October. They visited Vavuniya and had extensive meetings with government officials, members of human rights organisations and other community-based groups. While the focus of their visit was on the incidence of torture in Sri Lanka, the investigation into the Chemmani graves was also one their agenda for discussion with government and non-government figures.

The situation in the north and east has remained extremely tense, with civilian administration in Jaffna coming almost to a halt under threats from the LTTE. Electricity supplies to Batticaloa were severed after the blasting of some key transformers in early October and Batticaloa remained in darkness throughout the month. There were also sporadic reports of LTTE abductions of young men including schoolchildren from the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts.

Reports of malnutrition and people living under near-starvation conditions continued to flood in from the Vanni, and the onset of the monsoon intensified problems of access to some areas.

Suspension of civilian air traffic to and from the northern peninsula continued to create a wide range of problems for all concerned. Passengers were left stranded on both sides, with those due to travel to Colombo missing onward reservations, job opportunities and facing many other problems. Producers of non-durable consumer items, especially fruit, vegetables and fish, were deprived of access to the markets in the south of the island, while transport of essential medical supplies to Jaffna was also hampered. By the end of October, the problems created by the suspension of air travel to the north had become so severe, that it was reported that the Defence Ministry was re-considering its decision in this respect.

Controversy continued around the arrest and detention of judge Mahanama Tilakaratna, with key lawyers taking up his fundamental rights petition and others backtracking from their initial commitments to his cause. Attorney General Sarath Silva has had his personal life too dragged into the public debate by certain sections of the media. It is clear that hearings in the case will bring a show-down between the Attorney General and the head of the CID. Interestingly, and to the delight of human rights activists, the Attorney General in the course of the denials and counter-denials regarding the Tilakaratna case went on record as saying that Police officers could write 'anything' in their books. This discrediting of Police records, which often are produced as vital evidence in Court, could have many implications for the course of justice in the country.

On the War Front

At the end of September, Operation Jayasikuru launched by the Sri Lankan armed forces over 18 months ago to capture the main supply route to Jaffna has successfully captured the town of Mankulam. Thismeans a gain of about 6 kilometers along the

main supply route to Jaffna. According to Defence Ministry sources, this was a major strategic gain, since Mankulam is the transit point between the eastern and western sectors of the Vanni. More or less concurrently, the LTTE launched its own offensive, codenamed Oyatha Alaigal (Unceasing Waves) II against the base camp established by the Sri Lankan security forces in Kilinochchi. This camp, which was occupied by the 54th Division and the 543 Brigade, was completely run over by LTTE cadre and through this maneuver, the LTTE has now gained control over the Par anthan-Kilinochchi area. Military stra tegists say that this is a critical advance for the LTTE since it now gives them unfettered access to their administrative centre in the Vanni as well as to the Mullaitivu coast. The death toll was reported to be among the highest in the history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. There was a great deal of confusion in the first days, with conflicting reports from Defence Ministry sources. However, the final body count as reported by Defence Ministry spokespersons on October 8 stated that 186 army personnel including 64 officers had died in the Paranthan and Kilinochchi battles, while 789 including 18 officers have been placed on the 'missing in action' list. LTTE representative Tamilchelvam handed over more than 700 bodies of soldiers killed in this attack to the ICRC. Over 700 LTTE cadre were also reported to have lost their lives.

24 children fighting with the LTTE troops were captured by the Sri Lankan security forces during the Mankulam attack, and flown to Colombo. This was a propaganda coup for the government, since it was a clear reneging of the commitment made by representatives of the LTTE to the UN Secretary General's Special representative Mr. Otunnu that they would desist from recruiting children into their fighting forces. Child rights groups, however, were critical of the manner in which the children were exposed to the media, pointing out that this would perhaps be detrimental to the psychology of the children who had already been through a very traumatic experience.

In Jaffna

Posters calling for the closure of all government offices and schools, and for the evacuation of all civilian residences situated close to military camps and check points appeared throughout Jaffna including in the 'cleared' areas in the first week of October. There were also letters sent under the letterhead of the Tamil Eelam Administrative Service, calling on public officials to refrain from going to work.

On October 13, the 5 courts that had been functioning in Jaffna - in Jaffna town, Point Pedro, Chavakachcheri, Kayts and Mallakam - closed indefinitely following threats. Lawyers had stopped appearing in Court earlier on in the month, following similar acts of intimidation.

The LTTE also continued to issue threats to members of all local government bodies to resign from their posts. While many members have resigned, those who resisted the LTTE demand have been assassinated. On October 6, EPDP member of the Karaveddy Pradeshiya Sabha, Kanagasabai Rasadorai, was shot dead by 2 unidentified persons who had visited his house which is close to the Manthikai hospital. They had shot him at point blank range and escaped on a bicycle.

The military maintained very tight security throughout the areas of the peninsula under their control. On October 23, members of the army entered the premises of Kokuvil Hindu College and searched the school. This was reportedly the first time that the army had entered a school in the peninsula in over 2 years. Following the LTTE's call for evacuation of residences adjacent to army camps, the army put in place a number of rigorous controls on people traveling out of the 'uncleared' areas of the peninsula to the areas under army control. From October 31, civilians from Thambalagamam and Kaluthavalai in the Palai area were allowed to enter the areas under army control only on three particular days per week. The army also began confiscating the identity cards of persons living in the uncleared areas, thereby preventing them from traveling anywhere outside their own village.

Concerns regarding human rights abuse by members of the armed forces also persisted. On October 16, the high priest of the Selvachannithy temple in Jaffna disappeared. It was feared that he had been arrested by the army but no information could be obtained. It was only on October 29 that officials of the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna located him, in custody at the army base camp at Kankesanthurai. On October 17, there were reports that a schoolgirl of 16 years had been raped by 3 Navy personnel in Vadukkodai. However, there was no further confirmation of this incident in the days that followed.

On October 23, Rajaratnam Udayakumar (42) was arrested by the Police in Jaffna and detained in Police custody. On October 27, the Police handed over his body to the Jaffna Hospital, alleging that he had hung himself while in his Police cell. The JMO Jaffna refused to perform a post-mortem on the body, which was then flown to Colombo for autopsy. The Colombo JMO returned a verdict of death by suicide.

Chemmani Graves

Members of the Missing Persons Guardian Association in Jaffna continued their agitation for the promised investigation into the alleged mass grave at Chemmani to be expedited. The National Human Rights Commission, under whose jurisdiction this investigation falls, has been remarkably slow in proceeding with this matter, and there are very valid reasons why human rights activists have continued to express their concern regarding this delay.

The suspension of air passage between Colombo and Jaffna, and the onset of the north-east monsoon means that the exhumation of the bodies can now only be undertaken in a few weeks time. In the meanwhile, there have been doubts expressed as to whether there is being adequate protection being provided for the graves, especially in view of the fact that the site is located within area controlled by the military and out of bounds to civilians, thereby facilitating any tampering that may take place in an attempt to destroy vital evidence.

The Attorney General went on record inviting a delegate from Amnesty International to be present at the investigation. In turn, Amnesty International issued a statement calling on both the government and the LTTE to issue guarantees regarding the safety and security of those involved in the investigation prior to any

final arrangements being made regarding a visit to Jaffna and Chem--mani.

The Lionair Crash

Investigations on the crash of Lionair flight from Jaffna were at a virtual standstill. Fishermen from the Mannar area reported seeing a ball of fire dropping into the sea at Nachchikuda, north of Mannar. This area which is about 25 kilometers from Mannar town is under the control of the Tigers. There were reports that some bodies were retrieved from the sea and buried by fishermen along the Mannar coast. Although there was speculation that some persons may have survived the crash, the Bishop of Mannar issued a statement in which he said that there were no survivors.

While several sources, including the University Teachers for Human Rights, have categorically stated that the plane was shot down by the LTTE, there continue to be reports of technical faults in the aircraft as well. Lionair itself has remained tightlipped regarding the crash, and although there were initial reports of their engaging master divers to investigate the crash, no concrete steps have been taken to initiate a search for the plane. In addition, there has been a great deal of speculation regarding the legality of the operations of Lionair, with allegations being made that they had no certification from the Civil Aviation Authority to operate civilian flights and that their passengers were inadequately insured. In the meanwhile, the Air Force which is facing a severe shortage of air-worthy craft at the moment, hired the grounded planes from Lionair to fly goods and personnel to the north.

Vanni

Throughout October, reports continued to flow in from various sources in the Vanni areas regarding the rapid growth of malnutrition and virtual starvation among more than 30,000 families in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts who are suffering due to the persisting cut in the issue of dray rations. According to information received, the authorities in certain areas have been reduced to distributing half rations only amongst those they categorise as 'most needy'. Civilians in the Mullaitivu and Mannar Districts have maintained an almost permanent vigil in front of government offices and the Divisional Secretariats to express their protest against the cutting of the rations. This protest has been going on throughout September and October, and has brought work in these offices literally to a halt.

Shortages in drugs and essential medical supplies also continue to plague the Vanni areas. In Mullaitivu, doctors at the hospital complained that they were badly affected by the cut in issue of kerosene and threatened to launch a work-to-rule campaign to express their opposition to this measure. With the onset of the monsoon rains, there are also grave fears of the spread of waterborne diseases. The first cases of cholera began to be reported from Mannar District in mid-October.

In the East

On October 11, Batticaloa District was plunged into darkness following attacks on several key electricity transformers in the area by the LTTE. One attempt to repair the transformers was thwarted and since then the authorities have allowed the area to remain without power supplies.

There were repeated confrontations between the LTTE and members of the security forces in various parts of the Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai Districts. 8 Policemen were killed in an attack on the Aranthalawa Police Station, while security forces claimed to have launched a successful attack on a LTTE base camp in the mountainous parts of Amparai. A clash in the Central Camp area in Amparai led to several civilian deaths and many people temporarily abandoned their villages in this area out of fear.

Reports from Batticaloa said that 32 young men from Thumpalancholai village in Eravurpattu in the Batticaloa District had been abducted on the night of October 5 by an unknown armed gang in military uniform. This village which is located in an area outside the 'cleared area' is close to the Thambittiya military camp. There were allegations that STF personnel at the camp were responsible for this abduction. People of the area fled and sought refuge at Chenkalady through fear. There were also reports that the abductions could be seen as an attempt to drive away the civilians resident in the area. The whereabouts of 7 farmers who were arrested by the STF in this area last year are also still unknown. This situation has led to a heightened insecurity among the population of the area.

In October, there were also several reports of the LTTE forcibly abducting school children from several areas in the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts. Among the areas from where these reports came were Kokkadicholai, Porativu, Santhimalai, Ambalanturai and Karadiyanaru. It was feared that these children were being recruited for training, to replace those cadres lost in the Kilinochchi attack. As a consequence, a large number of families fled areas of the East under Tiger control, in an attempt to save their children from being kidnapped in this manner. Meanwhile, many principals and teachers of schools in Batticaloa District complain that they are unable to serve in these schools any longer due to the blatant activities of the LTTE.

On October 19, Iyathurai Inbaraja went to the Kalkudah army camp to report for registration. He did not return home. Several days afterwards, following systematic agitation by his parents, his body was found buried on the premises of the camp. The body had two gun shot wounds. It is not clear what action has been taken in this regard.

Negotiating For Peace

The peace process was in a stalemate situation throughout October, with the government and the Opposition continuing to engage in hostilities. The two redeeming features in the scenario were the release of six servicemen and 3 members of ships' crew by the LTTE on October 26, with no stated conditions attached, and the initiative taken by several leading federations of commerce and industry to bring forward a peace agenda from a different perspective.

On October 22, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, the National Chamber of Commerce, the Ceylon National Chamber of Industries, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka and the Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka organised a meeting of all political parties and interested groups and individuals at the BMICH in Colombo. The UNP was conspicuous in its absence. However, members

of the businessmen's consortium had individual talks with the UNP leadership, as well as with the President following the success of their meeting at the BMICH. Observers have commented that the entry of the business community in to the discussion about alternatives for peace in Sri Lanka indicates a new and hopeful trend in this arena.

The release of the six service persons, who had been in custody since 1993, the captain, Loyola Fernando, and one crew member from the Ms. 'Irish Moana' and one crew members from the Mv., 'Missen' on October 24 came as quite a surprise to local observers. The release was effected through the ICRC and there was no intimation that there were any conditions laid down by the LTTE for their release.

Mainstream Politics :
Continuing Conflicts

The conflict between the UNP and the PA continued to fester, while there were tensions within each grouping as well. PA backbenchers in Parliament called for a Commission to be appointed to inquire into allegations that UNP leaders funded and supplied weapons to the LTTE, during the Premadasa Presidency. Among the names mentioned were Ranjan Wijeratne, Ranil Wickremasinghe, Festus Perera, A.C.S. Hameed, Wijayapala Mendis and Sirisena Cooray. Their information was based on evidence given by former Army Chief, General Sepala Attygalle before the Kobbeakduwa Assassination Commission in August 1996.

There were also several reports of attacks against UNP meetings and on UNP supporters in different parts of the island. Unidentified armed gangs are reported to have attacked meetings held by the UNP to demand the holding of the Provincial Council elections and lifting of Press censorship at Gampaha, Eppawela, Mihintale and Kandy. In Eppawela, the jeep belonging to Ms. Kumari Dissanayake, a UNP candidate for the North-Central Provincial Council was set on fire.

Tamil Detainees

On October 5, 119 Tamil prisoners including LTTE suspects were shifted from Anuradhapura prison to other jails, following the exposure of a plan to attack and murder Tamil prisoners there. A tip-off from a prisoner had alerted the authorities to this situation and enabled the pre-emptive action. Reports stated that there were 76 LTTE suspects among the Tamil detainees, including three women. On hearing about the attack on the Kilinochchi camp, it was alleged that these Tamil detainees had shouted out 'Jayawewa' (Victory!). 56 army deserters who are also being detained in the same prison had threatened the Tamil prisoners with death following this incident. The situation had worsened on the following day.

Given continuing ethnic tensions within the prisons, the government once more reiterated its decision to shift all Tamil detainees arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Regulations to the Boossa camp in Galle. The same promise had been made a few months ago, following a clash at the Kalutara Prison in which two prisoners were killed. Now the transfer is scheduled for early November. The Boossa camp is now being renovated to facilitate this transfer. A total of 675 terrorist suspects are at present detained in prisons in Colombo, Kandy, Trincomalee and Kalutara.

Deserters

In October, the security forces announced one more joint operation to arrest nearly 35,000 deserters. Following several requests by family members, this action was deferred and a general amnesty declared during the days of 16, 17 and 18 October . Over 5000 were said to have returned to service during the amnesty period. On the 20th, the operation to arrest deserters got under way. The government also announced severe penalties for persons caught harbouring deserters.

Violence Against Women

Rita John, an Indian national married to Sri Lankan Tamil Jude Manoharan, was abducted while walking on the beach with her husband near his home in Crows Island, Colombo 13 on October 11. Her body was found in a shrub jungle close to the police from which she had been kidnapped, on the next day. The post-mortem revealed that she had been raped and strangled.

Four men from the neighborhood were taken into custody in this connection, and remanded. Following the arrests, residents of the area had stated that these men were a part of a gang that roamed that beach with impunity, robbing and molesting women. Several questions have been raised as to the security of persons in the area, and as to the efficiency of the Police in providing adequate security.

While in remand custody, three of the accused were subjected to assault by other prisoners.

The case attracted a great deal of attention, due to the sensational and tragic nature of the incident. On October 21, a coalition of women's groups organised a picket and demonstration in Colombo to highlight the increase in incidents of violence against women islandwide.

The case has also led to public debate regarding prosecution of rape cases and other cases of violence against women, in particular with regard to many demands for increased penalties. Senior DIG of Police, H.M.G.B. Kotakadeniya went on record calling for the death penalty for crimes against women, and raised a furore within the human rights community that has agitated for the abolition of the death penalty for many years. ●

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Pressure for Peace Mounts

The recent efforts by the private sector and the Alliance for Peace, amidst the tragedy of the continuing internal war, are signs that pressure is mounting towards a negotiated settlement. But there are also those dark and dangerous forces of extremism and committed to a permanent state of violence which want the carnage of recent years to continue.

The Sri Lankan government is ready for talks with the Tamil Tigers to reach a negotiated settlement to the island's long running ethnic war. That is what President Chandrika Kumaratunga is reported to have told a delegation of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) when it met her on 10 November.

The President is reported to have repeated to the TULF delegation her recent public statements to the effect that her government was prepared to recommence talks with the LTTE within a stipulated time-frame, and then decide on a cease-fire depending on the progress of the talks. She also appears to have told the TULF leaders that the government had to be cautious because of the failure of similar past initiatives, especially referring to the government-LTTE negotiations that took place in 1994-95 which was aborted when the LTTE resumed armed hostilities in April 1995.

The TULF known generally as a moderate parliamentary party representing the Tamils met the President in the wake of its Central Committee's decision to review its alliance with the government which it has been supporting in Parliament. The support of minority political parties like the TULF is crucial to the survival of the Peopl-es Alliance (PA) government headed by Kumaratunga because it has in parliament a wafer-thin majority of one.

Having supported the government in all its efforts, including the promotion of a peace package - devolution of powers and constitutional reform - the TULF leaders of late have become disillusioned and alienated because mainly two factors. The government has not succeeded in pushing through parliament the devolution package which, it is thought, would lead to a political solution, though many doubt it taking account of the rather extreme demands of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE-Tamil Tigers) who are engaged in what they describe as a 'liberation struggle' to create a separate state for the island's Tamils.

The second factor is that the war between government forces and the LTTE continues unabated with thousands of lives being lost on either side, but the main victims of this war being the civilian population of the Northeast of the island who are predominantly Tamil-speaking. In this context, the TULF has been urging the government to explore possibilities of recommencing negotiations with the LTTE, if need be with the assistance of an independent and outside third party acting as a facilitator.

On the first issue, the government is in great difficulty despite its often repeated commitment to proceeding with the devolution package. It needs a two-third majority in parliament to progress its devolution and constitutional reform proposals. But the main opposition United National Party (UNP) has blocked its progress by refusing to back the government on the issue.

Despite its protestations to the contrary, the UNP and its leadership appears to be determined not co-operate with the government. Though the UNP leader in public statements has supported the idea of devolution and talks with the LTTE, he refuses to sit with the government, discuss and iron out its differences and seek a bi-partisan consensus.

The TULF and other political parties representing the Tamils and Muslims, including the TULF, have had a number of meetings with the UNP leaders with a view to persuading them to reach a bi-partisan consensus with the governing party, but all these meetings and discussions have proved abortive.

The fact of the matter is that the UNP's counter proposals, which have yet to be finalised, offer much less on the devolution of powers than what the government has put on the table. In this context what the UNP has to offer to the LTTE draw it into a negotiated a political solution is unclear to say the least. Many feel that the UNP and its leader are not genuinely interested in seeking a political solution to the ethnic conflict, but are biding their time until the next election in which they hope to regain power.

Private Sector Initiative

If those responsible shirk their duty to solve a problem they themselves have created, then others who have become victims of the problem have to step in to solve it, and that is what exactly happened in recent days. Two major initiatives have been undertaken in recent weeks to underline the need for an end to the ongoing ethnic war and bring about peace to the troubled island and its people.

The first was the initiative from an unusual quarter, the captains of industry and commerce in the private sector, and the second was from a representative coalition of organisations and individuals playing key roles in civil society who came together in an 'Alliance for Peace'

Representatives of the private sector representing the leading chambers of commerce and industry convened a public forum on 22 October to promote a multi-party approach and consensus on national issues such as the ethnic conflict and seeking a lasting peaceful solution. The organisers had invited representatives from all political parties to participate in their deliberations.

The government welcomed the move from the private sector and announced its willingness to participate. But the UNP leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, refused to attend the conference on the ground that the government delegation was headed by Prof. G L Peris, the Minister of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National integration, and not by President Chandrika Kumaratunga! Infantile disorder, juvenile petulance and a congenital insecurity in participating in a discussion-setting among major actors in the field are some of the problems that have been attributed to the boycott by the UNP leader.

On the day prior to the conference, a delegation of the private sector initiative met the President and expressed their unanimous view that an early solution to the ethnic crisis should be found through a peaceful and negotiated settlement. They had expressed their 'deep concern' on the crisis facing the country pointing out that it was their intention to facilitate a dialogue between the Government and the Opposition 'as the process of dialogue between these two parties had come to a halt.' On learning of the reason for the UNP leader's boycott, it transpires that the President offered to lead the government delegation to the forum discussion if that would ensure the UNP's participation and requested the delegation to convey her offer to the UNP leader. But stood by his decision to boycott.

The business leaders, after discussion at the public forum, decided to seek lasting peace as its number one priority and requested the Government and the Opposition to nominate two representatives to work out modalities to achieve the objectives.

The private sector group's coordinating Chairman Lalith Kotelawala told the packed committee room A of the BMICH: "We will go for peace. That will be our priority for the moment and then concentrate on the need to achieve rapid economic growth."

The forum was attended by three senior Ministers of the People's Alliance Government, leaders of all minority and other political parties, NGOs, diplomatic community, donor agencies, the business community and the media.

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Leader M. H. M. Ashraff, Eelam People's Republic Front Leader Suresh Premachandran, Sri Lanka Progressive Front Leader Ariya Bulegoda, All Ceylon Tamil Congress Leader Kumar Ponnambalam, Industrial Development Minister C. V. Gooneratne, New Democratic United National Lalith Front Leader Srimani Athulathmudali, Liberal Party Leader Dr.Rajiva Wijesinghe, Ceylon Workers Congress MP P.Devaraj, New Left Front representative Leenas Jayatilake, Suriyamal Movement's Prof. Tissa Vitharana were among those who spoke at the forum.

After the conclusion of the public forum, the members of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka, Employers Organisations and Trade Associations in a press release said they Awish on behalf of the business community to convey their appreciation and thanks to the leaders of political parties, the Diplomatic Community, Non-Governmental Organisations, leaders of society and the general public for their enthusiasm and overwhelming support for the initiative to forge a bi-partisan approach by political parties in dealing with several key national issues. A special appreciation is recorded for the support extended by the media in making the initiative a success.

"The Joint Committee wishes specifically to acknowledge with appreciation the support and commitment extended by Her Excellency the President during the meeting with her. The Joint Committee also appreciates the good wishes for the success of the initiative as expressed in writing by the United National Party and looks forward to the meeting with the Leader of the Opposition scheduled for 26th October, 1998.

"The Joint Committee records with pleasure the successful conclusion of the initial meeting with political parties, the Diplomatic Community and Non Governmental Organisations, held at the BMICH on 22nd October, 1998 and the Committee looks forward to the days ahead when it will have separate meetings with political parties and other interested parties, in taking the initiative forward.

"The Joint Committee has endorsed the conclusions of the initial meeting, for the need to priorities the issues raised, in order of its contribution to growth and development of Sri Lanka and its people and has been agreed that for the present, the initiative will concentrate on seeking a bi-partisan approach in reaching an effective resolution of the North-East conflict.

"The Joint Committee appeals to all leaders of political parties in the months ahead to continue to support the initiative and also to refrain from any actions that may impede the initiative of progressing a bi-partisan approach to the resolutions of the North-East conflict.

"The Joint Committee will request all members of the business community to endorse the initiative by printing or stamping a common peace message and/or logo to be intimated by the Chambers, on all envelopes used by the business sector in their communications."

Alliance for Peace

A meeting of the '**Alliance for Peace**', a broad coalition of religious dignitaries, peace activists, academics, trade unions, women's and youth organisations, professionals, business groups and civic organisations took place on November 11 (Armistice Day, the day of remembrance of the costs and losses of the First World War) after over four months of planning at the 800-seat Public Library Auditorium in Colombo. The purpose of the organisers of the "Alliance for Peace" was to try to build up public pressure on the government and opposition to enter into a bipartisan consensus on ending the war in the north-east.

Having failed to interest the various political parties in its endeavour to set up a National Peace Task Force, the organisers of the Alliance decided it was necessary to set up a Task Force that would operate in an unofficial capacity to facilitate the coming together of the main actors that can influence events, particularly the PA and UNP.

On the day of the meeting, over 600 persons were in attendance, representing over 75 organisations, and including very well known and respected personalities from different fields of non-violent endeavour. The attendees included the Ven Malwatte Wimalabuddhi Nayake Thero, the Ven. Madhithiyawela Vijithasena Nayake Thero, former Vice Chancellor of the Vidyodaya University, Ven. Prof. Kamburugamuwe Vajira Nayake Thero, the Ven. Diviyagahe Yasassi, the Ven Pallekande Ratanasara, Bishop Winston Fernando, the internationally renowned theologian Fr Tissa Balasuriya, Human Rights Commissioner Javid Yusuf, Northern Muslim Rights Organisation Secretary Mou-lavi Sufiyan, former President of the International Bar Association Desmond Fernando, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy, Marga Institute head Godfrey Gunatilleke, Head of the Sociology Department of the University of Colombo Prof Siri Hettige, former diplomat Stanley Jayaweera, Hindu Council President Yogendra Duraiswamy and Hindu Congr-

ess President Kandiah Neelakanthan.

Detractors of Peace

However, there are still formidable extremist forces within Sri Lanka which are anti-peace and demand that the war continues with the accompanying death and destruction. They are determined to thwart and wreck any peace move even using terror tactics while masquerading as anti-terrorists.

The so-called National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT), an extremist organisation with well known ultras at its head have attacked the Chambers of Commerce and Industry for making efforts bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict.

In an open letter to the Chambers, which organised an all-party conference on the ethnic and other key national issues, the NMAT said that the island's business leaders had failed to realise that peace was being stalled not by the government, but by the 'barbaric' LTTE which would not settle for anything short of an independent Tamil Eelam. "Even persons of limited intelligence should realise that there is only one way to overcome terrorism. That is by militarily wiping it out," the letter said.

By demanding an end to the war, the business community was playing straight into the hands of the LTTE, the movement said. The NMAT charged that the island's business leaders had taken the cue from the LTTE and the other Tamil parties when they demanded that both the government and the opposition must guarantee equality of all citizens irrespective of ethnicity, race, religion and gender. Without naming the minority Tamils, the NMAT said that the "so called discriminated community" was threatened not by the state or the majority Sinhalese but by LTTE bombs. Sixty-three per cent of Colombo was from this community, and they were equally threatened by terrorist bombings of civilian areas in Colombo. NMAT appealed to the chambers to see that their Tamil members stopped contributing to the LTTE. But every businessman must contribute 10% of his or her turnover to the national war fund, it added.

Those associated with NMAT also tried to disrupt the meeting held by the Alliance for Peace (see article on page 15). Their terror tactics did not succeed. ●

Turning Point on the Sri Lankan Ethnic Front

Izeth Hussain

The Government troops have won Mankulam and lost Kilinochchi. In the aftermath there seems to have come about a widespread impression that we have reached a turning point on the ethnic front. This is obviously a situation in which we should challenge familiar assumptions, explore new directions, take new initiatives, instead of leaving everything in the hands of our politicians. But the public, by and large, seems to be far too apathetic to do anything at all.

The reasons for this apathy are not too far to seek. The momentum for peace, which seemed so promising when the PA Government came to power four years ago, has been dissipated, and now there prevails a weary disillusionment with the Government's performance on the ethnic front. As for the opposition, there seems to be no point in turning to it because the UNP, according to widespread perceptions, can be expected to go on playing its silly obstructionist role. Underlying the apathy is the notion that no matter what we say or do, we cannot meaningfully influence any of the main actors in our ethnic tragedy, that is the Government, the opposition and the LTTE.

But that notion is probably a mistaken one. This can be seen by considering the contrasting ways in which we can react to what is probably the ugliest feature of our ethnic conflict, namely the man-power problem. Usually, in time of war, deserters are shot. In Sri Lanka we have to beg them to return, and over five thousand have done so recently. On the LTTE side the problem is so serious that they are committing the barbarity of forcing children to the front.

The man-power problem exists because the affluent, the middle-class members, and those who are satisfied with their jobs and positions in society are not willing, with rare exceptions, to enlist in the armed forces of either the Government or the LTTE. Those who do, are overwhelmingly the poor, the unemployed, the excluded. Galbraith, champion iconoclast who has made a specialty of blurting out unwelcome truths, wrote in one of his books that it is the excluded who provide the man-power reservoir, the cannon-fodder, for the brutal wars going on in the Third World. Sri Lanka certainly provides an outstanding example. One way of reacting to all this is to be sniffily contemptuous about the class aspect, the slaughter of the children of the poor, of what the rest of the world probably regards as Sri Lanka's squalid little war.

Another way of reacting to the man-power problem is to say that it shows that there is no great enthusiasm, in fact no enthusiasm whatever, for the war among the broad mass of the Sinhalese and Tamil people. Instead of fighting each other they are peacefully interacting with each other, away that is from the battle front. This suggests that the majority of the people belong to what might be called a peace constituency, a conclusion that can be drawn from the data provided by Professor Hettige's recent opinion survey.

It is this peace constituency which should make it possible for us to influence meaningfully the main actors in our ethnic tragedy. No Government, not even a dictatorship, can go on indefinitely ignoring the wishes of the people with impunity. Our democratic PA Government can do so only to a limited extent. The point applies also to parties wanting to come to power, that is the UNP and the LTTE.

We can think of a number of strategies that might be followed in pushing for peace. This article will focus on just two of them. Both require more extended treatment than can be given in this article.

One strategy is to try to persuade the main actors in the ethnic tragedy, that is the LTTE, the UNP, and the Government to really commit themselves to the peace process. Perhaps

an effective way of doing this might be to encourage them to stop having wrong expectations about the future.

Euphoric Expectations

In the aftermath of the fall of Kilinochchi the LTTE might come to have euphoric great expectations about winning Eelam more than ever before. Such expectations might be fuelled by the misleading analogies sometimes drawn with Vietnam and Afghanistan. One super-power, the US, beat an ignominious retreat from Vietnam and so did the other super-power, the Soviet Union, from Afghanistan. The logistics of guerilla warfare are such that even the super-powers cannot tame peasants and backward tribesmen who resort to it. So the LTTE can win Eelam in the long run. But the crucial difference is that those super-powers withdrew from foreign, not their own, countries.

The more useful analogy should be with the large numbers of cases of separatist rebellions in the Third World. Overwhelmingly, the separatist wars have not led to separate states, even after decades of guerilla fighting as in Iraq, Turkey, Burma, Sudan and elsewhere.

Certainly it would be foolish to under-estimate the importance of the fall of Kilinochchi. Lt. General Kalkat, who headed the IPKF in Sri Lanka, says "Jaffna becomes very vulnerable now". It is conceivable that at the worst we may lose the North after some time, which will be a traumatic experience for the armed forces, the PA and its supporters. But gaining the North will not bring the LTTE any nearer Eelam than it did under the UNP.

We may revert to low-intensity conflict, which the economy may be able to sustain much better than the present high-intensity one. Economic development will be held back, but the main victims will be the Tamils in the North. Considering the LTTE's man-power problem, it may be that a protracted war will lead not to Eelam but to the only children's rebellion in history. The LTTE should do well to commit itself to the peace process.

So should the UNP which according to widespread impressions seems to have great expectations of coming to power by obstructing a peaceful settlement. Perhaps the best strategy is to try to convince the UNP that its obstructionist policy might actually prevent it coming to power.

The UNP must bear some facts in mind. In the past opposition parties have blocked devolution and yet returned to power at the next elections. But that was at a time when there was no war, with all its horrendous consequences. Today the same obstructionist policy can seem sub-moral, and provoke indignation and anger.

The UNP must also recognise that it is the architect of the ethnic problem in its present militarised form. The problem would have been solved long ago if not for the 1977 Government's resort to State terrorism, a case argued by the present writer in an earlier article. Thereafter the UNP, which came to be seen by the international community as a bullying genocidal gang, disgraced Sri Lanka by abandoning the North, to concentrate on making money in the South. The UNP must recognise further that the PA Government had no alternative to trying to regain the North, as without a military weakening of the LTTE it was, and still remains, inconceivable that the LTTE would ever agree to a peaceful settlement through devolution.

Outrageous Tactics

It is the above background that makes the UNP's prevarication and obstructionist tactics so outrageous. Its devolution proposals were unconscionably delayed, and some of them simply cannot be taken seriously. For instance the proposal which virtually means that the Central Government can dismiss Provincial Governments at any time at its own will and pleasure. It was demolished with impeccable logic by Justice Minister G.L. Peiris.

The UNP will do well to start rethinking its doctrinaire position that it will not engage in consultation with the Government to reach a consensus on the ethnic problem as long as it is attacked by the Government, and furthermore that it will not attend meetings at which Minister Peiris is present. This amounts to a farcical attack on democracy. For there can be no democratic governance unless Government can Opposition are able to attack each other. This by no means precludes the possibility, indeed the obligation, of their getting together over matters of supreme national interest. Democracy is a system which allows for the expression of the divisions in a society while at the same time acknowledging a base for consensus in the society. This is why Government and Opposition can get together in Britain over the Irish problem while continuing to attack each other. Why cannot the UNP follow the British example? Part of the explanation may be that old habits die hard. One of the most impressive features of UNP rule for seventeen long years was the depth of its dedication to anti-democracy. Probably the more important part is the depth of its dedication to obstructing a solution to the ethnic problem.

What is being enacted in the North and East is a tragedy. What is being enacted by the UNP is a farce. A price will have to be paid through the loss of minority support, the possible scale of which is suggested by the recent defection of 700 UNP members to the SLMC. We must try to convince the UNP that under certain circumstances a loss of majority support can follow.

The PA Government, quite unlike the LTTE and the UNP, was certainly committed to the peace process when it came to power four years ago. After negotiations with the LTTE failed in April 1995, the Government adopted the coherent strategy of weakening the LTTE militarily as the necessary prelude to persuading it to accept a settlement on the basis of a reasonable measure of devolution. At the same time the Government showed an admirable enthusiasm in formulating its devolution proposals, and hoped to obviate UNP obstruction by resorting to a non-binding referendum.

Change of Direction

But there was an abrupt change of direction last year. The devolution proposals were, in effect, shelved. It appeared that the Government also had come to nurse great expectations, probably because of the euphoria caused by the spectacular success of Operation Riviresa and Operation Jayasikuru in its earlier phase. It is dismaying but true that consequently the impression has been given to the minorities that there is really no great difference between the PA and the UNP because both are equally the expressions of the same backward political culture of Sri Lanka, of which chauvinism has been a notable feature.

(continued from page 13)

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The Dispossessed Muslims and the Silence of Convenience

Marwaan Macan-Markar

Vanity comes easily to our local politicians. And it is a syndrome that does not discriminate either. Look at those who have been bestowed with the trust of being the people's representatives and you will notice this trait in abundance. It is there across all party divides. It stands out on them the same way an ugly mole would on a forehead. The late President Ranasinghe Premadasa was typical of this breed. The current Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte oozes with it (what with his fancy for being a latter-day Sapumal Kumaraya and a Dutugemunu all rolled into one). And how can one ignore Saumyamoorthi Thondaman who has been making vanity into an art form for decades.

Last Friday, it seemed, was M. H. M. Ashraff's turn. And what a number he did. He chose that day, October 23, to bask in it. I am referring to the "coincidence" of two events we were informed of. One was the Muslim Congress leader's 50th birthday that fell on that Friday. And the other, a special moment chosen by his party: the opening of its new headquarters in Colombo. There was the customary publicity associated with it. Full page advertisements were taken out in the papers. It was a "coincidence" that could not be overlooked. No wonder it is being said that Ashraff is the "emir" of his party. They have become one and the same. Such a merging of the personal and the political would not have been the privilege of the others in the Congress brotherhood.

Another anniversary I would have not taken on the role of spoilsport here had Ashraff and his men spared a thought for another anniversary concerning Muslims that fell during the same period. One that began on October 22 and went on till October 31. But hardly an issue was made about it. No ads were taken out to highlight it. And any onlooker would be excused if she or he assumed it was an unimportant event. One worthy of forgetting.

I have in mind the eighth anniversary of the Muslims of the northern province being driven out at gunpoint by the Tamil Tigers. Eight years since the districts of Jaffna, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu were "cleansed" of their Muslim population. For it was on October 22, 1990 that quite unexpectedly the Tigers began announcing over loudspeakers in all Muslim neighbourhoods that they would have to leave immediately or be killed. In some areas, families were given two days to pack and quit. In Jaffna, a mere 24 hours. Overnight, close to 75,000 people became the dispossessed. Clearly, the "emir" and his party have a different set of priorities.

Vanity, I'd say, is the reason. But the Muslim Congress alone should not be singled out for this sin of silence. Other Muslim parliamentarians, too, have been equally remiss on this occasion. Even the irrepressible A H M Azwer, who has given the word jack-in-the-box a whole new meaning by his antics in parliament, hasn't been making the kind of noise he has the habit of making on a range of issues.

And what about Minister Fowzie? Isn't he aspiring to be the leader of the local Muslims? Don't the thousands of his homeless"brothers" and "sisters" have a place in his community? The latter lot, however, cannot be faulted for the vanity syndrome in this instance.

It is another feature that has contributed to their muteness on this occasion. And one, I should add, that the Muslim Congress, too, can be held guilty of. The silence of convenience. To some, it would only be natural to assume that those who have been ignored, the dispossessed Muslims, would have considered such an attitude very painful. But that would have also expected one to assume that there had been a healthy link between those who enjoy the trappings of power and the refugees. The former always taking up the latter's cause; making public their anguish.

But you only have to speak to any of the thousands of refugees crowded in camps in Puttalam to realise what has actually prevailed. There has been little to talk. And the Muslim refugees have grown to expect this silence. This is a view, in fact, that has been shaped after eight years of experience. After eight years of being let down. And it is to break through such a veil of silence that the dispossessed Muslims rallied to form an organisation of their own. One committed to address, primarily, their concerns. One that would articulate in any forum their views.

And that organisation happens to be the Northern Muslim Refugee Organisation. Listening to it you will realise why this Muslim voice differs from those in the east and the south. And no better example demonstrates this than the manner in which it has made known one of its primary aspirations - an end to the stagnation of

(Continued from page 11)

But in fact there are very important differences. The PA has been deeply committed in the past to the peace process, unlike the UNP which has been antagonistic to it, and the PA has been prepared to go much further in its devolution proposals. It is a question now of regaining a lost direction. The case for urging it is self-evident now that we have obviously come to a turning point on the ethnic front, that is with the debacle at Kilinochchi.

It has been argued in this article that at this turning point we should follow two strategies. The first is to make the main actors in our ethnic tragedy, that is the PA Government, the UNP, and the LTTE, to really commit themselves to the peace process. If that can be done, the rest should follow without too much difficulty. At the same time we should adopt a second strategy, the obvious one of persuading the Government to push its devolution proposals. It is so obvious that not much needs to be said about it in this article except that the LSSP's admirable statement of 20 September says in its last paragraph that a commitment to the peace process can be convincingly demonstrated only by presenting the PA's Draft Constitutional Amendment to Parliament. ●

its people. An effort to seek a solution according to its terms. And foremost is this desire to go home. To feel once again the warmth and the comfort of houses the refugees once knew.

But what does it mean to have lived eight years of one's life as these Muslims did? Let's take the children, for instance, those below 10 who have had to endure it. Psychologists say that the first six years of a child's life are the most important. A sense of security is paramount. But in refugee camps, they say, such conditions are wanting. The instability of the environment, the despair of living in limbo, affects parents. And that, inevitably, rubs off on the children.

One only has to visit a few of the 66 refugee camps scattered throughout Puttalam to be struck by this. And it is to change this that the NMRO is striving. To give a better life to the others, too, like the teenagers who move around listlessly within the barbed wire and cadjan fences of their compound, the young adults whose best years for work are being whittled away by the scourge of unemployment, and the old who simply want to go home and die.

In April this year, in fact, the NMRO held a meeting at the Puttalam town hall to consider this option, again. At that meeting, chaired by its current president, Latiff Burhanudeen, it was resolved to approach the Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran directly. A letter was sent, appealing that he permit the Muslim refugees their right to return home. That came in the wake of other feelers having been made months earlier between NMRO representatives and Tiger spokesmen in some European capitals. And that they were prepared to do despite the Tigers not having apologised for what they had done to the Muslims in 1990.

As Burhanudeen put it on that occasion: "Although Jaffna is declared free, the armed groups are there. The government may rule by day but the Tigers come at night. They can attack us again. We don't want that to happen. We need to talk to them; get their assurance. The people, our people, are demanding this. Only then will we go back. Once they have given their word, we won't be harmed."

The Tiger chief, however, has still to respond. And that is not new to the NMRO, either. For they have made similar efforts before. And have faced disappointments likewise. Nevertheless, they have kept on trying; they have made concerted efforts to keep the lines of communication, even though only from their side - the victims in this case - open. For as another NMRO officer favours saying, "The north is our homeland."

And it was in this spirit that one could understand why this weekend, too, the NMRO rallied its numbers in Puttalam to revive their call again. The occasion of their eighth anniversary of dispossession provided an apt moment. And it was not only an appeal to Prabhakaran that featured. There was an appeal to both the government and the opposition to give an ear to their clamour. For they desperately desired peace. It would be a way of ensuring their journey back home. In fact, if the numbers who gathered on that occasion had a sense to be optimistic, that could be understood in the light of what has happened re-

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PEACE ALLIANCE OVERCOMES UNEXPECTED ATTACK

Jehan Perera

It began as just another meeting, and potentially another "talk shop". Scheduled to commence at 2 pm, the organisers kept on delaying the opening, while glancing at their watches. They were waiting hopefully for those late coming stragglers. The 800 seat Public Library Auditorium was substantially empty to begin with, and would have demoralised the most ebullient of speakers. But a half hour later the hall was more than half full, and the size of the gathering looked respectable enough for the proceedings to commence. Fighting off the sleepiness of the early afternoon, few would have guessed that in little over two hours, this somnolent scene would give way to a physical battle for the control of the stage and the microphone.

The meeting of the broad coalition of religious dignitaries, peace activists, academics, trade unions, women's and youth organisations, professionals, business groups and civic organisations last week on November 11 (Armistice Day, the day of remembrance of the costs and losses of the First World War) took place after over four months of planning. The original purpose of the organisers of the "Alliance for Peace" had been to try to build up public pressure on the government and opposition to enter into a bi-partisan consensus on ending the war in the north-east.

Initially, the thrust of the Alliance was to request the PA and UNP to appoint two members each to form a "Peace Task Force" to work out the basic principles on which a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict could be found.

However, just as the business leaders who organised a highly successful "all party conference" last month are sadly realising, the two largest political parties in the country are not very enthusiastic about collaborating together in endeavours that they cannot monopolise. The government has its devolution package, which it has laboured over for over two years and, virtually alone, sees as possessing all the basic ingredients of a solution.

On the other hand, the UNP appears to believe that the government wants to hog the political credit for any solution, and so is content to play the role of the proverbial dog in the manger.

Having beaten their heads against the stone wall (and stony hearts) of the government and opposition leaderships, the core group of organisations that comprised the Alliance, then decided to call a larger gathering of civic organisations to discuss their predicament and design an alternative course of action. In a letter circulated to over a thousand key individuals and organisations, the the convenors of the Alliance which included Prof Tissa Vitarana of the Suriyamal Peace Foundation and Andrew Samaratunge of the National Movement for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation virtually admitted their failure and appealed for more support from civil society.

"Since our last communication to you on the above subject," they wrote, "the Organising Committee tried very hard to get the co-operation of the main political parties to set up a National Peace Task Force. It would now appear that from within our Alliance it is necessary to set up a Task Force that would operate in an unofficial capacity to facilitate the coming together of the main actors that can influence events, particularly the PA and UNP. The factual situation is that the two main political parties seem to have put back the solution of the ethnic conflict from their political agenda and given priority to preparing for elections. The recent developments on the war front (ie. the massive bloodletting at Killinochchi) do not appear to have made a significant change in this attitude."

The response to their letter was extremely heartening. By 3:30 pm on the day of the meeting, over 600 persons were in attendance, representing over 75 organisations, and including very well known and respected personalities from different fields of non-violent endeavour. The attendees included the Ven Malwatte Wimalabuddhi Nayake Thero, the Ven. Madhithiyawela Vijithasena Nayake Thero, former Vice Chancellor of the

(Continued from page 14)
cently in Colombo.

There has been, on the one hand, the initiative of the business community to give leadership to a peace initiative. And on the other, both the government and opposition have begun to see some validity in the dormant Fox proposals. Such a spirit of peace in the air, although still a glimmer, has a reason to excite. Particularly so for this dispossessed community. Some day, of course, they hope that would all be over; that they would be able to reclaim their lost heritage, their past. And when that does happen, I don't expect the Muslim politicians to be on the receiving line for bouquets and accompanying expressions of joy like "Alhamdulillah". For they would have preferred the opposite: a solution with a different outcome.

And what would that be? That the dispossessed continue to remain in Puttalam, becoming residents of the place, adding significant numbers to a substantial Muslim vote bank. And that is not a view offered from the reams of my imagination. It has been uttered in Puttalam. It has been mentioned in Colombo, where the vain and the powerful gather. Ideas pregnant with crass opportunism. The leopards, as they say, could never change their spots. Even if they happen to be Muslim leopards.

So on this anniversary that marked eight years since the Muslims were "cleansed" out of the north by the Tigers, the refugees reasserted why they have taken on to fight for their rights. They learnt years ago why they could never depend on those who conveniently ignore their desire. The "silent" members of their brotherhood who sit in parliament. ●

Vidyodaya University, Ven. Prof. Kamburugamuwe Vajira Nayake Thero, the Ven. Diviyagahe Yasassi, the Ven Pallekande Ratanasara, Bishop Winston Fernando, the internationally renowned theologian Fr Tissa Balasuriya, Human Rights Commissioner Javid Yusuf, Northern Muslim Rights Organisation Secretary Moulavi Sufiyan, former President of the International Bar Association Desmond Fernando, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy, Marga Institute head Godfrey Gunatilleke, Head of the Sociology Department of the University of Colombo Prof Siri Hettige, former diplomat Stanley Jayaweera, Hindu Council President Yogendra Duraiswamy and Hindu Congress President Kandiah Neelankanthan.

As the gathering was much too large in order to have the type of informal discussion that had originally been envisaged, it was decided to form two smaller groups to facilitate discussion in which all voices could be heard.

The main topic was to promote a bi-partisan political approach to finding a solution to the ethnic conflict while preparing the groundwork for a negotiated political settlement that would end the war in the country.

Thereafter the two groups re-convened in the plenary session, at which time the two chairmen of the small groups, both of whom were venerable Buddhist monks, took the stage to read out the conclusions of their respective groups. It was at this stage that the totally unexpected disruption began.

A member in the audience with the group of youthful disrupters stood up at this stage and asked whether the steps prescribed for peace would make the LTTE leader Mr Prabakaran lay down arms and talk peace. As if on cue, others stationed within the audience began to chant slogans in concert.

"Death to Prabakaran. We want terrorism destroyed. The war must go on till the end. We do not want peace till the terrorists are eliminated," they said. The disrupters who had stationed themselves in strategic positions within the Public Library Auditorium where the meeting was held sought to create the impression that the protests were coming from every place in the hall.

This was followed by moves on the part of the disrupters to forcibly take over the stage, at which point the organisers and others present moved to expel the disrupters. The group was then gradually pushed out of the hall.

The pushing and shoving went on for a while, with a few policemen trying to stand in between the participants and the disrupters. There was a great deal of shouting, abusive language and chanting of slogans by the disrupters who claimed to be from the National Movement Against Terrorism, a shadowy group of unknown influence and contacts.

The disrupters also distributed a leaflet under the name of the National Movement Against Terrorism, calling for the investigation and if need be, the arrest of certain prominent journalists writing for both the independent and state press who were deemed to be offenders under the ban on the LTTE. "Put the LTTE ban law into effect, investigate and if need be arrest them," the statement demanded. Ironically, all the journalists named

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(Continued from page 16)

were those writing solely in the English language press, which certainly gives a flavour of the English- language elitist bias of the National Movement Against Terrorism. On the other hand, their storm troopers were mono-lingual Sinhala-educated youth. The leaflet also called for the investigation of the National Peace Council which it claimed was a "War Council of the LTTE."

Much to their credit, the vast majority of the participants at the meeting stayed until the end, despite the attempted disruption. Many of them, despite their greying hair, also stood up to physically resist the disrupters who were less than half their age (and weight, for the most part) and were successful in evicting them from the Auditorium. The disrupters were kept out of the auditorium until the close of the meeting, at 6:30 pm with the appointment of a national committee to co-ordinate the programmes of the Alliance. The action plans presented by the working groups were also adopted for future implementation.

The inability of the disrupters to prevail was due to two main reasons. The first was the presence at the meeting of a fairly large contingent from the LSSP and the old left movement. While many were no longer young, they would surely have recalled thier halycon days when trade union action and street protests were the order of the day. They were not afraid of confrontation even if it meant fist fighting in defence of their right to peaceful assembly. In fact, some of them had to be persuaded not to thrash the young disrupters after they had been expelled from the hall.

The second reason for the ability of the peace movement to continue with their meeting was simply the disproportion in numbers. The pro-war disrupters were outnumbered at least 20 to 1 within the hall. Recent public opinion surveys, such as the one carried out by the University of Colombo's Centre for Anthropological and Social Studies bear out the pro-peace sentiment of the general population. After four years of bloody military stalemate in which thousands of armed combatants on both sides have paid the supreme price with their lives, the wish for a non-military approach to ending the conflict is clearly on the ascendent. ●

Compulsions of Waging War and the Hazards of Making Peace

D B S Jeyaraj

Newspaper advertisements and publicity brochures brought out by the Peoples Alliance government to mark the fourth anniversary of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's elevation to Presidential office share a remarkable "omission". References to either the Devolution package formulated by the government or the progress achieved by the armed forces against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are conspicuous by their absence in these propagandistic blurbs. That this omission is deliberate can be discerned from the fact that hitherto this government has been cackling and crowing about these two matters as areas of achievement. World opinion too had come to accept without question that this government had indeed made significant strides in tis direction so far.

The PA government itself was adopting a two-pronged strategy in combatting the LTTE. The search for a consensus on the basis of the devolution package formulated by it was aimed at winning over the Tamil people and isolating the tigers politically. The military campaign described as the war for peace had the objective of weakening and marginalising the LTTE militarily. The political proposals in theory were hailed internationally as a significant advancement and the Tamils notably the LTTE were pressurised to accept it. That the LTTE chose to reject it summarily was almost an act of political hara-kiri and went against its favour in International Fora. The military front too had mixed successes but was progressing at a pace that was painfully slow. Nevertheless these two issues were trotted out time and again by the President and her government as monumental successes. The nation was promised ad nauseam that the military and political enterprises were about to conclude successfully and that peace and prosperity were around the corner.

Peace Option Recedes

The fact that these two "cardinal" achievements of the PA government failed to find any mention in the latest publicity campaigns denote quite a few things. Firstly it indicates that a snap general election or early Presidential election where the people of the north and east are expected to vote may not take place as hoped for. Instead what may possibly occur are the staging of elections to Provincial Councils that were postponed some time ago. The lack of reference to the war and devolution in the government propaganda is in a sense attuned towards the Provincial council hustings where the preponderant majority of voters are going to be Sinhala. It is Sinhala and not Tamil or Muslim voters who will matter in these elections except perhaps in Colombo and sections of the Up-Country.

The war has not brought relief to the Sinhala masses in anyway. It has only increased their misery. The rising cost of living and lack of meaningful economic development are greatly caused by the war. At the same time government forecasts about an imminent victory against the LTTE and an end to war haye continuously proved to be false. Likewise the so-called devolution package apart from being suspected as a measure undermining the country's unity is also seen as useless in terms of ushering in peace. The LTTE continues to fight and disrupt peace in gay abandon is the Sinhala perspective.

Under these circumstances the government thinks that these issues will be non-issues in Provincial polls and seemingly desists from referring to it in publicity exercises that may very likely become the precursor to election campaigns. That a President and government who were harping consistently on these issues as achievements could "shelve" them for perceived political expediency at such short notice without any qualms is without doubt a disturbing sign of

political cynicism.

The malaise however is more deep seated than that alone. What is more revealing is that this omission amounts to a tacit acceptance that the pol-icy adopted by the government has failed. The war is unwinnable and peace package is unrealisable. Earlier this government was trying to set timetables in the military sphere in accordance with political requirements. It was hoped that military successes could be translated into Sinhala votes at the hustings.

In fact victory at earlier than sch-eduled Presidential or Parliamentary polls was envisaged solely on the basis of spectacular military victories against the Tigers. The provincial polls were postponed on the expectation that the "Operation Jayasikurui" would be concluded successfully before December this year. It has now been grudgingly recognized that neither the military nor political fronts are likely to register any modicum of success in the next few months. Hence the dropping of references to both.

This development can only become a sore disappointment to those lovers of peace and more importantly to the people of the North-East who are bearing the brunt of this war. A very disturbing feature of this changed situation is the growing perception that Chandrika Kumaratunga one time angel of peace is now showing more enthusiasm in the conduct of the war. After the Kilinochchi debacle she has supposedly taken charge of overall defence matters instead of leaving matters in the hands of her uncle and deputy defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte. One consequence of her taking the reins is a shake-up of top placings in the army hierarchy. More importantly a form of collective leadership under a joint command has been set up. This according to media reports has irritated Ratwatte who ran the campaign with sole authority in an arbitrary and unorthodox fashion.

Another feature of Chandrika's direct control according to media reports is the decision taken by her to allow her army chiefs full autonomy in conducting the war at their own pace. In short the earlier situation where Ratwatte was continuously fixing unrealistic deadlines on his generals will no longer exist. Instead the army high command will be free to progress in a slow and steady manner without being subjected to political pressure. That this will be of relief to the army and may possibly enhance their fighting performance in the future is the media projection. The hidden danger in this approach from the perspective of peace is that the armed forces will not have to expedite military activity for the purposes of peace negotiations. The war will grind on with its inexorable logic at its own pace. Until pugilistic objectives are achieved there will be no initiative for peace. In that sense the peace option in the thinking of Kumaratunga has receded at least for the present. Instead she has opted to prioritise the search for a military victory rather than a political consensus.

The prosecution of this war itself sullied Kumaratunga's reputation very much. The bombing and shelling of civilians, the displacement, the mass arrests, the tortures, the disappearances, the food embargoes, the banning of fishing etc contributed to this. But the hitherto positive aspect about her was her avowed commitment to a just and peaceful settlement. The situation prevalent suggests that in her own mind Kumaratunga too has given up hopes about the prospect of a political settlement right now. In her calculation she hopes to let the war run its own course with the expectation that some success could be registered shortly before election time. If and when spectacular military successes are registered she may toy with the idea of expediting elections. But unlike earlier instances where the military was pressurised to speed up to suit political timetables the emphasis now would be to let political timetables be set in terms of military advances.

This will create three problems for the peace constituency. Firstly Kumaratunga will not entertain or welcome any measure that would alleviate the hardship of civilians if she feels that it will hamper the military effort. For example the request by the Tamil parties that civilians and military personnel should not be mixed as passengers on the same ships has been sharply rejected by her. Her priority is the security of her soldiers and not the safety of civilians.

Secondly the logical conclusion of a military victory can only be the strengthening of Sinhala hardliners who will then resist all concessions to Tamils. Gen Daluwatte's interview to the effect that the devolution package would become redundant once the army wins its own objective is one illustration. It is also not a coincidence that Sinhala hawks become vociferously articulate when the military signals some success.

Thirdly there is the subjective factor of Kumaratunga herself becoming progressively alienated from the notion of a just and honourable political settlement as a result of this prolonged dirty war. Already most of her friends from the once dynamic peace constituency are alienated from her.

More importantly the Tamils who voted for her overwhelmingly are estranged from her. She herself has realised that the prosecution of this war has resulted in this development. Yet she makes no move to do some damage control at least. It is almost as if she has resigned herself to a situation where she thinks there are no hopes of her ever re-capturing Tamil hearts and minds again. This is not correct but if that has indeed become her mindset then it is certainly a setback for prospects of peace.

A Captive of Circumstances

The problem here is that like many eminent personalities who thought that a little bit of "compromising" with "evil "in the short term would be all right in the context of overall long term benefit Chandrika Kumaratunga herself has fallen into a trap. The "evil" here was the prosecution of the war at the expense of the peace process. Intellectually and emotionally Kumaratunga is not the person to espouse violence or war. In fact one reason for her astounding political success was the feeling generated by her in the minds and hearts of the masses that here was a woman who was genuinely and totally committed to the end of war and ushering in of peace.

The LTTE scored its first success when it succeeded in creating conditions where Kumaratunga had no option but to resort to war. Thus it caused a great contradiction to emerge in the case of a pre-poll and post-poll Chandrika.

Again Kumaratunga was of the view that war was only a temporary phenomenon to be concluded shortly

Ratwatte himself may have misdirected her in that. The end result has been that Kumaratunga has allowed herself and the country to be plunged into a quagmire. The war goes on endlessly with no solution seemingly in sight.

The sad aspect to all this is that Kumaratunga has herself become a captive of circumstances to the extent that she has no choice other than to sit astride the war horse while it trots, canters or gallops. Her government's abysmal performance in matters of governance has reached an all time low that there is great danger to her regime in terms of longevity. There is considerable heartburn among voters over her perceived inability to bring down the cost of living, curb inflation, generate employment or stamp out corruption. Only the fact that Ranil Wickremasinghe is adopting a watch and wait strategy along with inner divisions of the UNP is preventing political troubles from troubling her. If Wickremasinghe started a dynamic campaign channelling the resentment of the people in a constructive manners it would cause serious crises of governance.

Against this backdrop the only way out for her is to either bring about peace or end the war on a victorious note. Peace means once again the prospects of talking to the Tigers. Given her past experience she is reluctant to do so. More importantly for her to suspend the war now and resume negotiations with the LTTE would be tantamount to an open admission of defeat. There would be a tremendous backlash against her in the Sinhala community simply because of the reason that the LTTE has become totally untrustworthy in the eyes of the Sinhala people. There are few takers among Sinhala people that this war was thrust on the LTTE. Instead they feel that the government had no option but resort to war. Their grievance against the government is because of the slow and tardy progress and the false hopes raised by Ratwatte's hyperbole. So it would be political suicide for her to end the war without any victory and start talking. Her gamble can succeed only if the LTTE plays ball genuinely and agrees to a settlement. The chances however are that the LTTE will only use the opportunity, undermine her credibility and then torpedo the talks thereby signing her political death warrant. Also the UNP has cleverly pre-empted her in this by asking her to negotiate with the LTTE.

There was a time when Kumaratunga told the TULF not to raise the devolution issue with her until and unless the Wanni war was over. Thereafter the TULF remained somewhat aloof. But recently Kumaratunga invited the TULF for a meeting which that party spurned. The TULF has also passed severe strictures against her and the government. Deploring the commitment to war the TULF has said that it will vote against the budget. It looks like the TULF may have to oppose her openly in view of the government's transparent dedication to the war effort. Even the figleaf of a devolution package is not available now. The TULF will only echo the sentiments of the majority of the Tamil people if it stops supporting the government and leaves Kumaratunga to fight her war without the seeming sanction of the TULF.

So under these circumstances Kumaratunga is caught in the war trap. She has to go on with the hope that a victory will be in sight. Like the punter who goes on betting hoping to recover his earlier losses in a subsequent windfall Kumaratunga too has to go on supporting the war effort. In her case it is the only horse on whom all her political bets are placed. This certainly does not augur well for peace prospects.

Hazards of Waging Peace

Confirmation of Kumaratunga's resolve to go ahead with the military option at this particular juncture is further illustrated by her choice for the post of North-Eastern Provincial Governor. The vacancy was caused by the resignation of Gamini Fonseka the actor cum politician. In an unprecedented move she has appointed a serving army officer Maj. General Asoka Jayewardene as the new Governor. The man is also the commander in chief of the armed forces stationed in the Jaffna peninsula. He was until recently the overall operations commander in the Wanni zone. When a retired military commander Gen. Nalin Seneivaratne was appointed N-E Governor by JR Jayewardene the appointment came in for much criticism. The appointment of a serving officer by the President indicates very much that Kumaratunga is only concerned with the prosecution of the war and not about setting up a viable civil administration. There is a pertinent question as to whether a civil administration is possible in view of LTTE hostility. The counter to that would be whether a military option that is defeating the LTTE within a reasonable time frame is possible too.

When Ratwatte was visibly in charge of the war Chandrika could always plead ignorance of some horrible incidents in the war zone. Now she cannot do so. Also she earlier retained the option of dissociating from the war and its consequences if things turned awry. Now she has lost that option too. The reverse of this is that it is she who is going to bask in the reflected glory of a major military victory if and when it occurs. This also means that she has a vested interest in the fruits of war and that she will back the military effort to the hilt. This means of course that any peace initiative before her military goals are attained will not receive priority.

This state of affairs will certainly come as a great disappointment to a segment that was on the same wavelength with Kumaratunga four years ago. That segment is what is known as the peace lobby or constituency. In the forefront of this lobby are religious leaders, left leaning radicals, liberals , humanists, intellectuals. creative artistes feminists etc . Some are individuals while others are institutionalised as non-governmental organizations. These have generally the financial backing from several governments and powerful international NGOs. Their main strength however is the peace constituency comprising the ordinary people of Sri Lanka. The silent majority that wants peace and cuts across lines of race. religion, caste and creed.

The Peace constituency played a constructive role in promoting Chandrika Kumaratunga in 1994 as an apostle of peace. Her resounding electoral success was in a sense a victory of the peace lobby. The mistake (from the wisdom of hindsight) was that the peace lobby abdicated its vigorous role and began playing second fiddle to Kumaratunga and the government. It also allowed the LTTE to manipulate events to the point of projecting itself as an agent of peace. The PA too began the peace initiative as a

particular political project of the government and not as a national effort. As a result the whole exercise became tainted with partisan politics. When the govt - LTTE talks collapsed and war erupted the peace lobby was totally powerless. Indeed many of the peace activists felt that the PA will succeed militarily and kept quiet. Also the massive image built up by the peaceniks also was to her advantage. As a result when the peace lobby began attempting to assert itself again it found itself ineffective. Their activities were quite feeble in comparison with the juggernaut of war. Also several Sinhala hawkish organizations that were eclipsed by Chandrika's electoral victory began emerging like cockroaches from the woodwork again. The past few years has seen the odour of war pollute the social atmosphere while the fragrance of peace can hardly be smelt.

The present reality however has certainly caused some rumblings within the peace constituency volcano. One such symptom was the much publicised inaugural meeting of the National Alliance for Peace on Armistice Day at the Colombo Public Library. Business-persons of the Arms Bazaar and their henchmen masquerading as Sinhala patriots infiltrated the meeting and tried to disrupt it but were prevented from doing so. The inauguration of the National Peace Alliance consisting of several like-minded organizations and groups is a refreshing feature to emerge on the contemporary political scene.

WEAKNESSES OF THE PEACE LOBBY

While welcoming the fresh initiatives of the peace lobby it is also important to examine why they were ineffective in the past. As mentioned earlier the biggest blunder of the lobby was to abdicate its role to Kumaratunga. What is required of any movement for peace is to keep the momentum on political leaders to promulgate peace rather than become appendages of political leaders. In that sense what any peace movement worth its name should do is to dissociate from the Kumaratunga government in this area. Thanks to the image boost of Kumaratunga by the peace lobby, she is still not perceived by international opinion as a war monger. Whatever the reasons for her military posture those concerned about peace cannot subscribe to it.

More importantly the peace lobby cannot allow Kumaratunga to prosecute the war without opposition. It is very important for the lobby to educate international opinion that the conditions in Sri Lanka are not conducive for peace. The true situation regarding the devolution package must be publicised. In the absence of any possibility for a political settlement the on going war loses its justifying rationale. In blunt terms what is being pursued now is only a military solution. This reality must be impressed upon the international community. The peace lobby must discard its hang - ups about Kumaratunga and face up to the reality that is today.

Apart from this there is also a necessity to self-evaluate the peace lobby too. How many of the one-time peace activists allowed themselves to be co-opted as government and semi-government employees thereby losing their independence and voice ?

There must also be recognition that the war has also spawned a new breed which thrives on the cosmetic illusion of pursuing peace. Even as a new parasitic class has emerged as profiteers of war, there is also a tiny class that profits by pursuing peace. There are seminars, workshops, training courses etc that provide several jaunts abroad for the peaceniks. It would have been far more profitable for these activists to build up grass-root movements rather than present papers to academics abroad.

In addition to this it must also be realised that most peace organizations have lost their virility as a result of searching for funds abroad .Some financial input from abroad is certainly welcome to any impoverished organisation. Such funding would certainly help it to function effectively. But what has been happening is that a surfeit of foreign funding has made these organisations a prosperous bureaucracy. Working for these is no longer an idealistic challenge. Instead it has become a comfortable avenue of revenue with perks and all. As a result these organisations have begun neglecting their main resource base the people. Instead they have now mastered the art of formulating projects for grants and furnishing performance sheets that would satisfy the donors. Maintaining the illusion of seeking peace has supplanted actual efforts to attain peace. Thus many peace organisations have lost credibility in the eyes of the ordinary people.

This state of affairs has also led to most peace organisations from being cur off from grass roots. Very little activity goes on there. Also peace activists have hitched their wagon to the government star. They are associated with ventures like Sudu Nelum, Thavalama etc. All these are laudable enterprises from the government point of view. Nevertheless they are state controlled. A healthy grassroots peace movement on the other hand must sustain its own dynamism to be really effective.

Another defect among concerned peace activists is an overload of work. Whether due to paucity of qualified and motivated peace activists or for some other reason one finds that many of these people are handling a variety of functions at different institutions. That many of them are efficient and dedicated is beyond question but the fact of the matter is that they simply have no time to discharge their multi-faceted duties efficiently. Again the casualty is the peace initiative.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE ?

The great strength of any viable peace movement lies in the people particularly in a democracy. The success of a peace movement lies not merely in a top heavy appeal signed by sections of the elite or by stimulating intellectual exercises in academia. The real test is the galvanising of the ordinary people. The natural allies of the peace movement are not in the affluent cities but in the rural areas. To cultivate this resource committed activism is necessary at a grassroot level.

Likewise another must for a successful peace movement is the strengthening of civil society. The people must be mobilised for peace This will consist of a thousand and one things from school discussions to street plays, from distributing li:-

erature to holding wayside meetings. If taken singly these activities may not appear to be tremendously effective. The consociational method of elitist understandings may seem important. But in the long run it is only people movements that will deliver the goods. In this context it is also important to encourage people to people movements among the various communities. This will cement understanding. A worthwhile example was the Mothers Front that cut across ethnic barriers. But once again that front too lost its lustre after the PA came to power.

Thus it is necessary for the peace movement to find its moorings again and reactivate itself effectively. At the same time it must continue to keep up pressure on the parties concerned to engage in peace. These activities should not be directed at the government alone but also at the UNP and other opposition parties. More importantly it should be directed at the LTTE which arguably is the greatest obstacle to lasting peace. Merely asking the government to negotiate with the LTTE is meaningless unless parallel pressure is applied on the Tigers too. Today the LTTE functions without being accountable to any one. The premier challenge before the peace lobby is to find ways and means of bringing about pressure on the LTTE and its supporters to negotiate for peace. This can only be done through public opinion generated amongst the Tamil people. For this there must be a healthy exchange of views within the Tamil community. The peace movement can start by pressurising the Colombo based Tamil media to promote peace and start criticism of the LTTE. A related effort is required in the case of the Tamil political parties too.

These are daunting tasks but the peace movement must address itself to these effectively if they wish to register success in their endeavours. A Sinhala Consensus in the South on what political settlement is possible along with a genuine LTTE willingness to negotiate sincerely for a solution are essential for actual and permanent peace. That these goals are difficult to achieve is not doubted. But then these are the hazards of waging peace. ●

After Four Elusively Eventful Years Can the Tide be Turned for the Better?

Dr. Oswald B. Firth OMI
Director, Centre for Society and Religion

The lessons of history of the past twenty-five years is that both the UNP and the SLFP, while in office, have systematically deceived the people claiming that they needed more power to serve the nation effectively. In reality, both have enhanced their power to serve themselves, not the nation or its people.

The torch has now being passed onto a new generation. The new President and the new leader of the Opposition were born around the time of our independence. The task that lies ahead for both of them is unenviable. They both have to cooperate to rid this nation of a Constitution that promotes authoritarian rule of the majority. They both have to cooperate to re-establish the Rule of Law which has been willfully breached to obtain short-term gains that resulted in long-term losses. They have to cooperate to ensure that our youth no longer rise in rebellion. Above all, they have to cooperate to contain the present ethnic problem.

This is the forceful and formidable message that flowed through the pen of the author-diplomat, T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, in his second volume of the "Politics of Sri Lanka", written soon after the Presidential Election of November 1994.

The Sri Lankan ethos is such that being efficient is perhaps not the most important aspect of a person. Being likeable, however, carries a far greater premium. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has prodigiously combined both in a manner that is most ingenious and appealing to many. During her short term in office as Prime Minister, and subsequently as President, she has developed a captivating smile that has the potency to disarm and destabilize even her most trenchant critics and her most implacable opponents when they are in her presence. Her recent encounter with world leaders at the SAARC Summit, at the Non-Aligned Conference and then at the United Nations are ample testimony to her overall comportment and her magnetic personality that can mesmerize people and put them at ease.

Her presence exudes an esoteric air sans sophistication, and devoid of the cosmetic gestures and flamboyant stunts usually associated with stage-managed politicians. The cultural refinements that she exhibits in the presence of her foreign counterparts are traits of her personality that cannot be acquired in just one single generation.

Transcending Party Politics

While President Chandrika Kumaratunga can pride over her many political successes at both regional and international levels during her four years in office, her dismal and distinctive failure has been her incapacity to transcend the divisive delimitations of partisan politics and enlist the support of a somewhat intransigent Opposition to address major issues that continue to beleaguer the country. A cursory glance at her four years at the helm of a nation on fire is a sufficient indicator of lost opportunities to rebuild the nation-state on a firm footing of peace and economic prosperity for all ethnic communities. The derisive language that pervades the atmosphere when referring to the main Opposition, and the trade in accusations on both sides, have often been so intensely acrimonious and acerbic as to narrow the space for dialogue at all levels on issues that are of concern to the whole nation.

This has unfortunately been the case with the most excruciating crisis in the country, the North-East war that is continuing to gnaw away at our religious and cultural value systems that knitted the nation's religio- cultur

al diversities into a holistic tapestry of mutual respect for all living beings and for resource sharing. Those halcyon days of nation building have now transmogrified into an era of brutal terror, abominable fear, unbridled violence and shameless harassment. The blame for such a state of affairs must fall squarely on the shoulder of our politicians.

Politics is, after all, about power. But if power is not illuminated with virtue to become a service to people, it will soon transform itself into an irremediable pollutant of one's own mind and of others as well.

The gloomy clouds of war revealed a silver lining when President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe signed the bi-partisan agreement in 1997 to keep each other informed of initiatives taken in the direction of peace. That initiative appears now to be sterile and stalled. It is most unfortunate that this bi-partisan agreement, a fleeting ray of hope though it may have been, did not move the two major parties in the country to leap beyond party political vested interests and harness the support of the minority political parties, the press, the electronic media and other civil organizations in a bid to craft a consensual and sustainable political solution to the burning crisis. That previous "All Party Conferences" on resolving the ethnic issue have failed could be trotted out as an excuse for not inviting the Opposition to a more involving dialogue. In fact, our intellectual culture has always been a culture of excuses. And when an intellectual culture entertains the habit of tolerating excuses, it will never be able to produce the social will needed to resolve problems, however pressing they may happen to be.

In fact, the bi-partisan agreement could have been the first delicate step of a process of enlightened power-sharing that could have served as a model for resolving the ongoing and cantankerous conflict, a model that could have been emulated not only by many other political parties, but by the different ethnic communities as well. It is indeed sad that our youth and children will have to carry into the future the war syndrome and a degenerate political complacency that was not of their creation. And all this because the two main political parties in the South are determined to deny any political advantage to one another. This has led to unresolved differences on a Constitution that could guarantee the democratic freedom and political rights of all communities that inhabit this shattered paradise.

Promising the Sky

All governments take a fiendish delight in making numerous pre- election promises intended to win votes and fool the masses. No sooner elections are over than these promises give rise to seething discontent and relentless frustrations when the masses have settled down to their routine crucible of daily life and discover that they have been misused and misled. In making such fictitious promises, neither President Chandrika nor her political allies that formed the PA have been the exception. The price of a pound of bread weighing 450 grams - the symbol of the nation's economic woes - was reduced from Rs. 5.30 to

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Rs. 3.30, only to be jacked-up to Rs. 8.50 within the space of a couple of months, and that without the slightest regrets. A kilo of flour, priced at Rs. 11.80, was reduced to Rs. 7.40, but has now taken a quantum leap and is presently priced at Rs. 20.00 a kilo. Pricing of consumer items is in such chaos that price controls are nothing but a heap of baseless rhetorical shibboleths. This chaos has led to greater confusion with the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax by even payment hawkers and small time traders for whom fleecing the helpless consumer is hardly a matter of conscience.

The promise to promote local farm products with guaranteed prices to ensure the survival of the farmer faced with the onslaught of the open economy has miserably floundered. While the farmers are at their wits end to sell their produce at prices that could at least cover their costs, tons of chillies, potatoes, onions and even tea are being imported under the pretext of preventing scarcities in the market. Is it surprising then that farmers should find solace in a dose of insecticide or weedicide so easily available to them? Other farmers find themselves near helpless when their valuable phosphate deposit at Eppawala is to be sold for a song to a notorious mining company that has ransacked such natural resources in Indonesia and elsewhere.

A Disturbing Record

Alongside the victorious performance in the field of cricket at the famed stadium at Lords and other sporting events at the Commonwealth Games in September, Sri Lanka's achievements in the area of human rights too deserve a round of applause. More specifically, President Kumaratunga deserves these encomiums in that she has been able to restore the nation's erstwhile tarnished image. We are once again honoured as a nation of civilized people whose respect for the prescriptions of the United Nation's Human Rights Charter may have the dubious distinction of surpassing sooner or later that of Rwanda, Kosovo, Somalia and even the Taliban infested Afghanistan!

In recent times, however, that image has been sullied and vestiges of the legacy of government sponsored human rights violations are casting long shadows over the nation. While investigations on the Vijaya Kumaratunga and Lalith Athulathmudali assassinations have been concluded and brought to the notice of the public, the Commissions set up to investigate the Batalanda tortures and the Sooriyakanda mass graves are proceeding at such lethargic pace that these reports may never see the light of day before the end of the century.

The National Human Rights Commission, for all intents and purposes, seem to be dilly-dallying on pursuing investigations on the Chemmani check-point mass graves, based on the revelations of Rajapakse, one of the soldiers accused of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy, and the murder of her mother, brother and a neighbour who went in search of the ill-fated school girl. Although mandated, the National Human Rights Commission is engaged in delaying the investigations rather than facilitating it. This Commission has gone on record as stating that further technicalities, such as obtaining permission not only from the Ministry of Defence, but also from the Jaffna Magistrate have to be attended to prior to investigating the mass graves. In the meantime, parents and family members of the disappeared have mounted an almost continuous vigil at the office of the HRC in Jaffna anxious to know how this parlous state of affairs is to be resolved.

The case of the arrest of the High Court Judge, Mahanama Tilekaratne, is another of those controversial incidents that can bring President Kumaratunga's government into disrepute on accusations that a similar situation prevailed during the J.R. Jayewarde-ne's regime. Judge Tilekaratne had obtained bail on an assault charge, but was re-arrested by the CID Director, Mr. Bandula Wickramasinghe, acting under orders, as he said, of the Attorney General, Mr. Sarath Silva. The incident, which smacks of vindictiveness, has succeeded in bringing the black-coated gentry onto the streets in defence of the human rights of one of their own.

Censorship of news from the war zones and postponement of elections are other instances where President Chandrika's government stands indicted of fundamental human rights violations. What really happened in the killing fields of Kilinochchi is still shrouded in mystery and the numbers of those dead have become a matter of wild speculation. Added to all this, the slashing of rations to the refugees in the Wanni is bound to bestir the international community from its relative silence and slumber on the Sri Lankan issue.

Turning the Tide

President Chandrika's current tendency appears to be that of making vital policy decisions through small caucuses of techno-bureaucrats which are called "Task Forces". This is how Air Lanka, the national carrier, came to be bartered away behind a veil of secrecy. In the absence of transparent State policy, the citizen's vigilance merely tends to end up in despair and cynicism. Unfortunately, the way in which our system of democratic governance is structured does not enable the democratic institutions themselves to benefit from the views of educated and informed citizens. This has reduced even enlightened citizens to the level of mere onlookers, or passive recipients of decisions made by a small parvenu elite, the members of which may not necessarily be elected representatives of the people. Such a system does not provide the country with an effective mechanism for a meaningful bipartisanship in the affairs of government which is sine quo non for a permanent solution of all national problems in general and the elusive ethnic conflict in particular. But, who then can change the direction for a more participatory and consensual, and transparent and accommodative form of governance, at least during the remaining tenure of office of the present dispensation? On whom then can the people repose faith to bring about this sea change - the elite business community with its immense financial clout or the organised workforce with its unsurpassed yet untapped potential to effect such a radical change? Better still, these two vital segments of our society should coalese together in this regard to bring such pressure on both the Government and the Opposition which they could ill-afford to ignore.

(The writer is also the Editor, "Social Jus-tice", the monthly journal published by the Centre for Society and Religion.)

Amartya Sen and Assertion of Humanity

T.N.Gopalan

When the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences announced on October 14 that the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics was being awarded to Prof. Amartya Sen for his path-breaking work in famine studies and his concern with the poorest of the poor, it marked a signal break with its own time-honoured convention of acknowledging only the conformists.

As noted left-wing economist Ashok Mitra acidly observes, "Perhaps the decision is not as honest as the committee has made it out to be. Two fairly non-descript economic statisticians who dabbled in the so-called miracle of derivative economics as applied to the stock markets were chosen for the award last year. These two were closely associated with the financial firm, Long Term Capital Management, which collapsed, leading to the loss of the life savings of hundreds of thousands of American households. Part of the ignominy on account of this stock market fiasco also devolved on the Nobel Committee, which is why these reluctant journeymen have now chosen a development economist." But more important than the admission of defeat by a relatively conservative bastion is the fact that the award does represent the acknowledgement of the desperate need for asserting humanist values in a world stretched on the wrack of market forces and a revolting glorification of the virtue of selfishness.

At a time when the South Asia is sinking ever deeper into a morass of poverty and mindless violence, the award in fact underlines the need for serious introspection over where we are heading to.

There are those who carp at economists who escape the Indian poverty for greener pastures and then sermonise on what should be done to eradicate poverty in their native land

Perhaps Prof. Sen who emigrated to the USA in the Seventies cannot escape such a criticism. But then the question is who has contributed more to making life on this earth that much a better place to live in, Amartya Sens of this world or the Prabhakarans, the Pol Pots and a whole host of other "revolutionaries" and assorted militant crusaders?

In the early eighties, when Tamil militancy was on the ascendant in Sri Lanka and this writer was part of the cheering group in Tamil Nadu, a priest from Netherlands and an acknowledged expert on Marxism, sought to douse the euphoria - "I'm afraid the fate of Lebanon could overtake the island of Serendipity too, with gun-toting militants calling the shots and killing each other in the process...I'm especially appalled by the culture of cyanide capsules, I don't see it as a symbol of supreme sacrifice but as a negation of life..." And there is this fiery journalist ensconced in the comforts of the west who glorified the suicide bomber as one whose sole weapon is his or her very own body and hence the greatest of the martyrs the humanity has ever seen.

Far from the killing fields of Sri Lanka, Kashmir or Afghanistan, Amartya Sen has nevertheless been obsessed with the degrading and dehumanising effects of poverty and relentlessly nudging the high-priests of economics and the rulers everywhere to see the stark reality before them.

"The fact that economics is also concerned with the poor, the downtrodden, the underdogs of society is something that is very close to my heart," Sen has observed repeatedly.

Prof.K.N.Raj, a friend of Sen recalls that once the latter wrote to him saying, "I have never had the illusion that I was saying something that had not been said before. But I did think that I was saying things that could have saved some lives if they were reflected in policy. To use Ashok Mitra's phrase, if our great- grandmothers ran governments, they would have saved many lives indeed." This touching humility, this poignant concern about saving lives, is what makes Sen not just one of the most important economists of our times, but also a well-rounded humanist, an increasingly rare breed in an increasingly fractious world.

To quote from yet another eloquent tribute to Sen, this one from columnist Praful Bidwai, "Amartya Sen is not just an economist, nor did he get the Nobel Prize as a practitioner of that 'dismal science' alone."

He is one of the world's great economic philosophers, that rare breed of thinkers who remind us that economics is about the real world, about choices and transactions which involve or assume values, institutions and patterns of behaviour - themselves historically determined and hence far from immutable, unlike the "iron laws" formulated by dogmatists.

Amartya Sen is the economist's economist, the philosopher's philosopher.

More, he is a public intellectual who brings morality into public policy discourse. He represents the social scientist's conscience in a highly evolved form. "An outstanding aspect about Sen's work is his consistent opposition to authoritarianism despite his pronounced left-wing leanings. His work on the causes of famine, on inequality and on the measurement of poverty, has saved a large number of lives," notes another commentator.

Amartya Sen's Poverty and Famine (1981) influenced the way international organisations and governments deal with food crises. He showed that famine was not just a consequence of nature, but an avoidable economic and political catastrophe. Drought and flood often precede starvation, but declines in food production rarely account for it.

Typically, even if many thousands of people die, there is enough food in the country to go around or enough money to import it.

Disaster strikes, Sen found, when the poorest people can no longer afford to buy food because they lose their jobs or because food prices soar In the great Bengal famine, in which three million people perished, Indi food supplies were not unusually low Colonial rulers, immune to democratic

pressures, simply stood by.

Partly because of Amartya Sen's finding, governments now focus less on direct distribution of food and more on replacing the lost income of the poor, through public works proj ects and the like.

That apart he has consistently maintained that democracy as a form of governance is vital to the well- being of the society, lack of dissent, of opposition which enables the ruler to reign as he or she pleases could be fraught with disastrous consequences whatever the claims of authoritarian regimes or of their apologists might be.

"There has never been a famine in a democratic country because leaders of those nations are spurred into action by politics and a free media," he said in an interview and went on to note wryly that in undemocratic countries the rulers are unaffected by famine and there is no one to hold them accountable, even when millions die. Surely such an observation has much larger implications beyond the issue of famine-relief alone.

Typically Sen was in New York to attend a memorial service for Mahbubh Ul Haq, a former Finance Minister of Pakistan, his close friend and the architect of the annual human development index, when the news of his bagging the Nobel broke out. In his interviews he poignantly recalls his association with Haq and says that their friendship transcended national and religious borders.

Yet another timely reminder of the great possibilities of human existence and which gives the lie to sectarian fanatics of every kind.

Haq had said in his report of 1997 that South Asia is the poorest and most illiterate region in the world, and yet its governments buy more weapons than anyone else. "The South Asia has been sinking fast into a quagmire of human deprivation and despair, emerging as the most deprived region in the world," the report said. Now Haq is known to have used some of the welfare indices developed by Sen and his Human Development Report funded by the United Nations serves as a potent eye-opener.

Incidentally Sen has also condemned in no uncertain terms mindless defence spending, especially nuclear weaponisation. Also he is a strongly secular person and never hesitates to speak out. Plurality, he says, "also concerns the diversity within Hinduism itself... Hinduism must also be seen as thoroughly plural in structure. Its divisions are not those only of caste... but of schools of thought... When the fourteenth century Hindu scholar Madhava Acharya... wrote his famous Sanskrit treatise... he devoted each of his sixteen chapters to the different schools of Hindu religious postulates (beginning with the atheism of the Charvaka school)..." At a time when the world is teetering on the edge of recession and the once admired Tiger economies are falling like ninepins, leaving the Western think-tanks desperately groping for answers to the innumerable questions the South East Asian collapse has provoked, Sen does provide some pointers to a way out.

Unfortunately even in India whose leaders have rushed forward to congratulate Sen on his achievement, of course the right-wingers more rel-

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THE SANGH PARIVAR BARES ITS FANGS AND INSULTS BOTH SANSKRIT AND TAMIL

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

At last, the National Agenda is over and the BJP has banged in hard its very own agenda. Its allies, especially the Dravidian and other regional parties, were left gaping and stunned as the BJP's human resources development minister Dr Murali Manohar Joshi crudely pushed in a Hindutva agenda in the conference of state education ministers convened by his department in Delhi last month and found himself at the receiving end..

A nuclear phycisist, Dr Joshi had taught at Allahabad and among his students were V P Singh, who went on to become prime minister even as Dr Joshi was learning the hard tricks of politics after joining the BJP.

Dr Joshi is set in the hardcore mould and is close to the patriotic science groups in the universities. His nuclear physics background did not prevent him from gleefully watching the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in December 1992. His latest antics is to substitute Hindutva academic proponents in place of left-centrist scholars in the Indian Council for Historical Research, and thereby, launch a movement for rewriting history as Hindutva in school textbooks. Of course, Dr Joshi would say, that the best bet for Hindutva to spread would be to start the stuff right within the rigid walls of the classroom.

The first to realise the new agenda for the state education ministers' conference were the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh governments, ruled respectively by the left and Congress. They shot off protest letters, forcing Dr Joshi to hastily defend his proposals. He justified the invitation extended to Vidya Bharati, the educational wing of the Sangh Parivar, saying that it was a non-governmental organisation running more than 1,200 schools mostly in tribal areas. meanwhile, education ministers of several other state governments joined the chorus of protest and ensured that one P D Chitlagia, a Calcutta-based businessman with Sangh Parivar links, would not speak as scheduled at the conference. Dr Joshi had no answers when he was peppered with questions whether non-Sangh Parivar education experts would be invited for the next conference on education reforms! And education secretary P R Dasgupta had to write letters to the National Minorities Commission doing some hard explaining that the government had no no plans of interfering with the rights of minorities in running educational institutions.

The BJP got a rude shock at the conference venue when education ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, all ruled by parties which are supporting the coalition government at the centre, chose to protest along with others. The inagural session of the conference, where a Sanksrit shloka invoking goddess Saraswathi was sung, provided the critics of the government with a hot issue. Even as prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee watched in amusement and horror, the majority of the ministers, led by Tamil Nadu education minister K Anbazhagan, walked out of the conference venue, of course, to join in later. But they had made their point clear - singing the Vandana would send wrong signals to the minorities; other education reforms contemplated by Dr Joshi and his friend Chitlangia like compulsory teaching of Sanskrit in school level would create more problems; more than half the population could not read or write their names even in their respective mother tongues, they kept pointing out.

Dr Joshi would have none of it, sensing just some politics behind the walkout and boycott. Dr Joshi recalled that the Vandana had indeed been sung at a welfare ministry function during the previous united front regime. What he forgot to add was that the context was not so controversial as this one arranged by him, specifically to push Hindutva down the throats of state governments. The Sangh Parivar came to his aid saying that secular state education ministers were incapable of respecting the goddess of Learning. The Parivar asked Sonia Gandhi to keep away from criticising the traditional Hindu culture (?) criticising her as "an Italian" and launched abuses at the leftists. For his part, Chitlangia later tried to deny his links with Vidya Bharati itself. Worse was yet to ome: Vajpayee, who tried to clear the air at the conference with some jokes that speaking in Hindi would not invite protests in New York but could do so in Delhi. started addressing election rallies blaming non-BJP parties for their apparent disrespect to the goddess of Learning! So much for the leader of the "coalition"!

The usual brazen Hindutva line is to accept the charge of fascism levelled by its opponents. And Dr Joshi was revelling in doing just that, even while seemingly backtracking at the conference venue. Here was a chance for him show that the BJP could go well beyond the shackles of the National Agenda. And the BJP and Sangh Parivar couldn't care less about protests and rebukes from Dravidian allies like the AIADMK.

(continued from page 5)

ctantly than the rest, there is still no honest attempt made to acquaint oneself with Sen's theories or involve him in any economic planning. The reasons are obvious. No one would like to invite trouble by roping in a man who not only dares fly in the face of the Western wisdom but also makes uncomfortable demands on the rulers.

When asked what he would do if he is made the Finance Minister of India, he shot back, "Simple. I'll resign. What could one do in a place where education is not given the importance due to it?" Given the limitations of such brilliant, well-meaning intellectuals, what does one do? Turn one's back on such "weaklings" and rally behind the "crusaders and revolutionaries", whatever their warts in the hope that after "liberation" somehow things will be set right? Or get down to the more painful, less- exhilarating, (perhaps even less-rewarding in the short term) task of understanding Sen better, spread his message and work for a more humane society? ●

PMK and the MDMk! And the BJP has lost sight of the original intention of the conference to ensure universal primary education in India!

Alas, tragically for Sanskrit, the Sangh Parivar thinks only on the lines of compulsion, monopoly and defiance. The Hindutva proponents cannot understand that learning is not just a symbolic activity of keeping hoary traditions apart, but as much for pleasure and use. The Sangh Parivar cannot understand that the study of Sanskrit can be promoted better in a liberal atmosphere, if it is on an optional basis and if such an effort should not come into conflict with the development of the mother tongues of those who make up the majority of India. The Sangh Parivar stands for crudity, while, as a language, Sanskrit stands for refinement. This language has had a unique history, a unique relationship with other languages of the subcontinent. The Sanskrit grammarians led by Panini are hugely praised by modern linguists including Noam Chomsky. Sanksrit algorithms and mnomonics fascinate computer scientists and Sanskrit texts like Hata Yoga continue to draw a variety of students ranging from American novelist Jerzy Kozinski to controversial popstar Madonna. And learning of Sanskrit can well turn out to be an interesting affair for the curious-minded.

Close on the heels of the Sanskrit/ Saraswathi Vandana controversy comes the Archana controversy in Tamil Nadu. For long in recent times, Sanskrit had the pride of place in archana offerings, and during the sixties, it was made known in every temple Archanas would be done in Tamil as well.

These words - as well - have certainly irked the Tamil enthusiasts who have managed to get rid of these words. Sasnkrit and Tamil thereby have equal access for archanas in the temples. Irked by this, one V S Srikamar, known to be close to the Sangh Parivar, has gone to court saying that the agamas allowed only Sanskrit archanas. This evoked a sharp response from the Tamil enthusiasts, who now want to do away with Sanskrit archanas in toto. Some Tamil organisations, with the tacit backing of minister for Tamil culture and official language Dr Tamilkudimagan, went on a protest fast in front of the Kapaleeswarar temple at mylapore in Chennai. While their demand for Tamil archanas and hymns is correct, the attempt to exclude Sanskrit would amount to denying the possibility of the existence of the Tamil-Sasnkrit dialogue through the centuries.

The arguments of Srikumar before the Chennai High Court would not cut ice as it is amply clear from countless Thevaram and Prabandham hymns that their singing had been immensely popular in ancient times. The hymns of woman saints Karaikkal Ammaiyar and Aandaal have tremendous mystical power, enchanting the gods forever. According to the great Saiva and Vaishnava Tamil saints, God is both Tamil and Sanskrit and certainly all languages.

The later Saiva agama canon Kamikagama clearly spells out that Tamil can be used for archanas. By arguing for monopoly of Sanskrit archanas, the Sangh Parivar followers have exposed their ignorance of Tamil language and insulted Tamil culture. ●

AN APPRECIATION

PROFESSOR SINAPPAH ARASARATNAM 1930-1998

By Prof. Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson

Those of us who knew Arasa, as he was affectionately referred to by his friends, will mourn his loss the more because we will all miss his ringing voice and his gargantuan laughter. Arasa was a scholar of great distinction and chose to live very much a life of a recluse in sultry places such as Kuala Lumpur and Armidale at the Universlty of New England where he served with much acceptance as Chairman of History for several years. Arasa was the younger person of the two of us. We met at the then University of Ceylon located in Colombo. In due course we became good friends. There was, however, something in the man which kept him distinctly aloof and he lacked the closeness that good friends evolve over several decades. Arasa had been my friend for a little more than forty years. We used to meet in London when we were PhD students and on occasions when he and I were visiting the metropolis.

He was soon to establish himself the leading scholar of the Dutch colonial phase in Sri Lanka and the South Indian coast. He received worldwide recognition but unfortunately was accustomed all the while to place his light under a bushel. He wrote in liquid prose, as it were, and an enchanting style more befitting the captivating storyteller than the avid dry-as-dust professional historian.

Very early in his academic career, he realised that the troubled conditions in the island would leave him little time for concentration on his research and writing. He obtained an opening when a mutual friend of ours, the Reverend Doctor Xavier Thani Nayagam annexed the foundation chair of Indian Studies at the University of Malaysia giving up his senior lectureship in education at Peradeniya. Thani Nayagam reorganised the department of Indian Studies, placing it on a sound footing and recruiting established scholars as faculty members of his department. Arasa found the aftermath of the 1958 riots very unsettling and readily accepted a senior lectureship in Indian Studies at Kuala Lumpur. Needless to say he found the atmosphere in Kuala Lumpur quite conducive and congenial and he doubtless enjoyed working with Thani Nayagam.

Before leaving Sri Lanka, Arasa started work on his well known and widely acknowledged book on Ceylon for a series on new countries being published by Prentice Hall. He used a novel approach to treat his subject, not the conventional path. He took each community on the island and analysed their sociology and interlinkages. This treatment threw much more light on the social and political life of each of the different communities. Prior to this publication, a Dutch publisher subsidised the publication of his PhD thesis on the Dutch Power in Ceylon along with a parallel vol-

ume by Professor K W Goonewardene, another of our leading recognised historians. With these publications and a good research record, the University of Malaysia was only too glad to welcome him. Soon Arasa was to win his spurs at his new workplace. He spent much time on his lectures for which he earned a well deserved reputation. In his spare time he worked on a slim volume on Indians in Malaysia which again was warmly received especially by the largely sizeable Indian community in Malaysia.

His opportunity came when Father Thani Nayagam set in motion the Flight International Association of Tamil Research (IATR for short). My wife and I were invitees to the stellar conference of distinguished scholars from all parts of the world. This was a shot in the arm for Tamil studies and indeed the occasion was a carnival of splendour. The Malaysian government had been liberal in funding this major undertakIng. Arasa being Thani Nayagam's righthand man was a pillar of strength and helped tremendously in the organisational work. Thereafter the IATR's became regular features in Chennai (Madras), Paris and Jaffna. Certainly the entire structure was a big boost to Tamil nationalism and indeed to a Tamil revival, it was all praises to Thani Nayagam and Arasa his Johannes' Factotum.

Things were hotting up in Malaysia and the Malay-Chinese conflict began becoming increasingly bitter. Additionally it became government policy there to change the modium of instruction from English to Malay. Arasa saw the writing on the wall. At that stage in his life, he was not ready to switch to even a Romanised Malay. So he did the next best thing and obtained a place in an Australian university, that land of indigestible wealth at the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales. My wife and I visited him there and we commented on its dreadful loneliness. Even the chirpiest of persons could die of sheer boredom. But Arasa was like the proverbial xerophyte plant which thrives in desert conditions. He seemed to prosper well there and was liked very much by his departmental colleagues. They published a festschrift in his honour when he retired.

It was in his isolation in New England University, Armidale that he wrote up his research which came out as learned tome on the subject. These comprise a body of pioneering work and made Arasa into an internationally respected scholar that he became. He was invited to various seminars and conferences and listened to with enthusiasm and great interest. He spent a very productive year at the University of Texas (USA) and gave of his wisdom and knowledge to many a graduate student at the University's Centre of South Asian Studies. Subsequently he was the winner of the coveted Smuts Fellowship in commonwealth Studies at Cambridge University and was at the same time elected a fellow of Clare College.

After retirement, in his correspondence with me, Arasa did not appear to enjoy his well earned rest. He complained of loneliness and boredom and empty spaces which he found difficult to fill. He was a not infrequent visitor to Sri Lanka and liked the intellectual millieu in the various campuses. He continued to be a sad and worried witness of the troubling situation in his native country.

One of Arasa's last contributions was a chapter to a volume on 'The Sri Lankan Tamil identify' - (1988) edited by Professors C Manogaran and Bryan Phaffenberger. In this chapter, Arasa used all his skills as a historian to reaffirm the Tamil concept of a traditional homeland. This constitutes a valuable and lasting contribution.

Nationalism was however his forte and he used his razor-sharp mind and meticulous scholarship to lean on this highly complex subject. His augural lecture at the University of New England in 1974 traversed the field of History, Nationalism and Nation Building: The Asian Dilemma. He published a richly insightful chapter on Nationalism, Communalism and National Unity in Ceylon in Philip Mason's (editor) India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity (Oxford at the University Press) and in 1979, Nationalism in Sri Lanka and the Tamils in Michael Roberts' (editor) celebrated collective identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Modern Sri Lanka (1979).

In death as in life, Arasa will continue to be a shining beacon to all truth and genuine end objective academics. The world of scholars has lost a valuable icon. We will be the poorer for this. His death leaves a huge chasm which will require much time to bridge. ●

BOOK REVIEW

DISCRIMINATION WITH REASON?

By Devanesan Nesiah

344 pages, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997 ISBN 0 19 563983 9

Review by Dr. S. Narapalasingam

Dr. Devanesan Nesiah CCS, needs little introduction. He is well known to many especially the academics, politicians, managers and social workers, having held several senior positions in the Sri Lankan administration. Prior to his retirement from government service in 1995, he was the Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Environment and Women's Affairs. The origin of his book is assigned to his doctoral thesis (Dr PA, Harvard 1989). It has been subsequently updated in the light of many developments in the field and the relevant revisions are incorporated in the book. Nesiah is well known among Tamils of northern Sri Lanka - he functioned as the Secretary, District Ministry and Government Agent in the 1980s in Jaffna.

The book's title is likely to raise some curiosity among Sri Lankans, because of their distinct views on the subject formed either by the reactions of the minority groups that have been adversely affected by the past discriminatory policies of Sri Lankan governments or by their convictions that these policies are justifiable from the standpoint of correcting the imbalances arising from the lack of equal opportunities that denied many Sinhalese in rural areas access to higher education and high level employment. The subject is no doubt sensitive and complex for various reasons, especially when those groups that get penalised by forced policies of discrimination object to them on various grounds such as violation of their individual and group rights. These have invariably generated heated debates and hostilities wherever they have operated.

The book is a good reference even to know the host of problems that often

arise from trying to solve the problem of inequality through positive discrimination. The author has taken pains to explain the circumstances and the compulsions that may require the recourse to affirmative actions or protective discriminations or preferential policies. He has very lucidly explained why these should be resorted to only when there are no other alternatives and where these are unavoidable why they have to be phased out after some specified time.

The objective way in which the author has analysed this complicated subject reflect his logical thinking and ability to analyse complex problems from all relevant angles without any preconceived notions. "Discrimination with Reason" is an inter-country study of affirmative action. The author, has chosen three countries viz. the USA, India and Malaysia to analyse the theoretical and the practical aspects of this policy. They have been selected because of their differences in socio-economic status, the circumstances of the protected groups, and the nature of preferential policies. The legal and functional differences between Affirmative Action in the USA and Protective Discrimination in India are discussed by means of many specific cases. He has cited the outcomes of 42 legal cases in the USA and 21 in India to explain the working of the litigious policies. Unlike in the USA and India, the protected group in Malaysia is politically dominant and moreover the judiciary here has not played any significant role in this area. This peculiarity is explained to the wide acceptance of Malays and Tribals as Bumiputras (sons of the soil) and all non-Bumiputras as non-indigenous people, irrespective of their citizenship.

Readers may be disappointed that the author has not included the experiences in Sri Lanka in this inter- country study. This is presumably due to the reason that at the time it was undertaken, he was still a high-level state employee in the island's civil service. However, this gap has been filled to a great extent by his recent article on - Ethnic and District Quotas - published in the quarterly journal Marga, Volume 14, No.4, 1998. In discussing whether there is a case for the adoption of ethnicity, or gender or area based preferences in Sri Lanka, he says "in some circumstances, for certain purposes, within limits and for short periods (these) may be necessary." Some instances have been cited to explain this point. Hopefully, the author will include in the next edition, this case study on the working of preferential policy in Sri Lanka, supplemented by the harm done to nation-building first by the single language (Sinhala only) policy and later by the failure or neglect to make necessary adjustments to accommodate minority interests.

The importance of distinguishing between Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities on the one hand and between Individual Rights and Group Rights on the other is emphasised by the author. The definitions given are simple and clear. He has pointed out that "the US Constitution upholds individual rights to the total exclusion of group rights; American affirmative action is based only on individual rights, even though it includes group based preferences for certain ethnic groups and women." Thus, there is no explicit prescription in any American law for ethnicity or gender based preferences. The US Courts have interpreted the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to permit only conditional constitutional backing for affirmative action. In contrast, India's Constitution explicitly permits preferences for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes who are also not politically and socially powerful. These cut across the linguistic, cultural and regional identities of India's population.

The important contribution of Dr. Ambedkar, who was the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly in spelling out in detail the various provisions for preferential policies in the Indian Constitution is also revealed. The author states that this section of the Constitution is an expression of the contract between the national political leadership and that of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India. He has compared this to the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 not in legal terms but more as an expression of the contract between the American Presidency and civil rights movement headed by Martin Luther King Jr. The continuation of the preferential policies without the prospect of phasing out has now become a contentious issue. Some of the antagonists in the US are from the protected groups themselves. The book is also a repository of useful information on the making of the constitutions of USA and India, which have relevance to Sri Lanka at the present time.

This book will help those who are seeking answers to disturbing questions like: If preferential policies are not flawed conceptually, when and how these should be implemented without creating the ill effects that have thepotential to destroy the integrity and cohesiveness of the society. Will ethnically-based preferences help to reduce class inequalities within groups? Do they always hinder national integration? What is meant by efficiency or merit? Can ethnicity, gender and other preferences be compatible with these notions? Can merit, need and quality of public services be completely ignored in applying preferential selection methods? Do preferential policies prove to be economically inefficient and avoid any long-term solution to the social problems? Is it permissible to use preferential policies mainly to hold on or gain political power? ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu aunt *seeks professional partner for attractive niece, 29, British educated, graduate, employed, Mars eighth house. Send horoscope details. M 1057 c/o Tamil Times.*

Hindu mother *seeks professionally qualified attractive bride for doctor son, 28, qualified and working in UK. Mars in seventh house. Send horoscope, details. M 1058 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek suitable bride for son, 33, graduated from renowned US universities completing Ph.D., Molecular Biology. Send horoscope, details. M 1059 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek bride in UK for son, M. Phil., Computer Science, 31, in good UK employment. Send horoscope, details. M 1060 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu parents *seek professional groom for fair, good looking, Doctor daughter, 30, 5'2", employed in London. Mars seventh house. Send horoscope, details. M 1061 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu mother *seeks professional partner for son, 34, 5'5", Development Engineer, UK permanent resident working in London. Send horoscope, details. M 1062 c/o Tamil Times.*

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OBITUARY

Mr. Pararajasinghan Vasanthakumar *(48) FCA (Sri Lanka), CPA (USA), formerly of Kanesalingam & Co. (Sri Lanka), Rothmana (Zambia) and Auditor-General (Papua New Guinea); dearly beloved husband of Savitri; loving father of Prasanthi (McMaster University, Canada) and Ashwini (Turner Fenton Secondary School); son of the late Mr. & Mrs. T.C. Pararajasingham (Alaveddy South); son-in-law of Dr. P. and Mrs. S. Sivasothy (UK); brother of Thirugnanasampanther (UK), Thambipillai (Botswana), Sivayogawathy (New Zealand), late Sivanesawathy, Gnanasivam (Zambia), and Sivagnanawathy (Sri Lanka) and brother-in-law of Indra (UK), Gowri (Botswana), late Ramanathan (New Zealand), Natkunasingam (Sri Lanka), Saraswathy (Zambia), Sivapathasundaram (Sri Lanka), Sivakumar (USA) and Ramani (UK) passed away peacefully in Canada on 24.09.98 and was cremated on 26.09.98.*

His family wishes to thank all those who helped them during his illness, attended the funeral, paid floral tributes, sent messages of condolence and shared in their grief. - 5038 Heritage Hills Blvd., Mississauga, Ontario L5R 1V5, Canada. Telephone 905 712 1583.

(We regret the error in the last issue.)

IN MEMORIAM

Richard Jeyarajasingam
Born: 20.11.1928 Entered Glory: 27.11.1990

All too soon you suddenly passed
Beyond our present sight
You left us and the world we knew
Without your radiant light
But we know that like a candle
Your lovely light will shine
To brighten up another place
More Perfect more Divine
Free from every harm and pain
Where one day we shall meet again.

Fondly remembered by
Ranee and Children.

Tenth Death Anniversary

In loving memory of **Mr. P.V. Nadarajah** *on the tenth anniversary of his passing away on 16th November 1988.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his loving wife Thilagavathy; children Usha, Varathan, Nalini and Nanthini; sons-in-law Sivanathan, Rajkumar and Vathsayan; daughter-in-law Savithiri; grandchildren Bairavi, Luxmi, Uruthiran, Abhirami and Sebestian. - 9 South Park Crescent, Catford, London SE6 1JJ. Tel: 0181 473 8894.

In Treasured Memory of a Dear Husband and Father

Dr. T. Kanagaratnam *(11 Dutch Road, Tellippalai, Sri Lanka).*

Fondly remembered on the twentieth anniversary of his passing away on 20.10.78 by his ever loving wife Mangalapoovathy (UK); children Shantini (UK), Ranjini (Sri Lanka), Gunam (UK), Sarojini (Rajee) (Canada), Nalayini (Singapore) and Dhakshayini (UK); sons-in-law, daughter-in-

Continued on page 31

Continued from page 30

law and grandchildren.

'Deep in our hearts your memory is kept,
You were loved too dearly to ever forget'.

- 'Greenacres', 63 Sandown Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, UK.

Mrs. Chandra Ragupathy

In Loving memory of my beloved darling wife Chandra on the third anniversary of her passing away on 26th November 1995.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her darling husband Ragupathy. - 262 Wricklemarsh Road, London SE3 8DW.

In loving memory of **Santhiapillai Tiburtius,** *retired teacher, Point Pedro on the first anniversary of his passing away on 2nd December 1997.*

Love and Remembrance Last For Ever.

Sadly missed by his wife and children.

(Appreciation appears below).

Sixth Death Anniversary of Dr. P. Alageswaran

Born: 4.7.28 Died: 10.11.92

A beautiful life full of kind deeds,
A helping hand to those in need,
Unselfish, loving and kind
Sweet memories that are left behind.

Much loved and missed by Ratnes, Krishna, Shyamala, Family, Friends and Relations.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 1 *Pirathosam.*

Dec. 2 *Thiru Karthigai.*

Dec. 3 *Full Moon; Sarvalaya Theepam; Feast of St. Francis Xavier.*

Dec. 5 *South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in for Elders. Tel: 0181 542 3285.*

Dec. 6 *Sankadakara Chathurthi.*

Dec. 7 *Karthigai Somavaram (3).*

Dec. 8 *Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Patronal Feast of the Jaffna Cathedral.*

Dec. 11 *Feast of St. Damascus.*

Dec. 12 *2.00pm SLTWG Children's Christmas Party at St. John Innes Youth Centre. Tel: 0181 542 3285. 6.30pm Tamil Performing Arts Society presents Five Plays at Merton Hall, 76 Kingston Road, London SW19. Tel: 0181 459 4335/470 7883. 7.30pm SCOT Christmas Dinner-Dance at Greenford Town Hall, Ruislip Road, Greenford, Middx. Tel: 01895 257788/0181 904 9227/870 9897.*

Dec. 13 *Feast of St. Lucy; Patronal Feast of St. Lucia's Cathedral, Colombo.*

Dec. 14 *Eekathasi; Karthigai Somavaram (4); Feast of St. John of the Cross.*

Dec. 16 *Pirathosam.*

Dec. 18 *Amavasai.*

Dec. 19 *7.00pm SLTWG Christmas Dinner & Disco at Merton Hall, 76 Kingston Road, London SW19. Tel: 0181 542 3285.*

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In Loving Memory

Joseph *sisters* **Victoria** *and* **Lily,**
And friend **Anna,** *were a trinity;*
They were fragrant **Roses** *- from*
Uduvil Alma Mater *- So Glorious:*
No premonition had the sisters whatever,
That morn, when they woke up together:
In life they were compassionate and selfless,
But **death** *clasped them -* **In flaming human torches:**
We search for an answer,
Why death like this should they encounter?
Anna, went a few days earlier,
Followed by sisters who went together.
We will remember this **Trio** *always,*
For their loving and endearing ways:
Pain and anguish are all over: In **Him,**
Are they now, in **Eternal Slumber.**

Old Girls of Uduvil - London

Santhiapillai Tiburtius - An Appreciation

It is a year since Santhiapillai Tiburtius passed away. Tiburtius popularly addressed Tibs was so dear to me that I have not recovered from the shock of his death. The first meeting I had with him was at his residence in Puloly West. I was introduced to him by a friend and colleague of his at Puloly Boys' High School, where he taught before leaving for Nigeria. My regard for him grew stronger as he always showed kindness to anyone who associated with him.

One day I solicited his help to extricate an innocent orphan who was mistakenly arrested during a state of emergency in this island. He was in the midst of a celebration but he, unconcerned about his own safety, willingly rendered assistance to the discomfiture of his invitees. Such a person has left us not at a ripe age but at sixty four.

He was born in Myliddy and studied at St. Patricks College, Jaffna from where he gained admission to the University of Ceylon and obtained a science degree at an age that could have led him to the administrative service. He was not tempted by offers of executive posts either in the government or private sector and dedicated himself to the teaching service helping many a student to shine in a high position in Sri Lanka, Nigeria and other countries. He had a clear understanding of the subjects he taught. His post graduate studies in education enhanced his approach to teaching and his teaching methods had a distinctive quality. His sincerity to the welfare of his students gave him pleasure at retirement.

continued on page 32

continued from page 31

Tibs was such a great man that in addition to his work in the class room he took an active part in social work to uplift those in the poor working class to a better position in society. In the prime of his youth, he participated in politics as a member of the Communist Party and was a member of the Labour Party while in London. He had a good command of the English language, read widely and had a versatile mind. He was capable of conversing effectively and with ease on a range of topics. He was a keen sportsman,his interest and enthusiasm in games was infectious.

'Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said
This is my native land'.

He thus left the shores of England to embrace his birth place Sri Lanka.

He was witty, sociable, knowledgeable and above all a compassionate person. He was born a Catholic, but did not identify with any particular religion. He married a Hindu science graduate teacher and they were blessed with three children, who are highly accomplished and amiable and are a credit to the parents.

His demise has created a vacuum, leaving all of us, his associates, his beloved wife and children in grief.

We pray for his soul to rest in peace.

R. Rudra, Advocate & Attorney at Law, Sri Lanka.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

The Abaya Karam Organisation *held its annual concert in aid of the Ramakrisna Mission Orphanages in Batticaloa and the Durgapuram Mahalir Illam, Tellipallai at Bankstown Town Hall, Sydney on17th October 1998. This year's concert was presented by the students of Thillai Nadanalaya School of Dance by its Director Smt Damayanthi Balaraju. The first half of the programme consisted of Pancha Nadai, a pure dance where the dancers performed to the rhythmic beats of the five drum syllables; a Shakthi dance and a composition which portayed the 108 Karanas or poses depicted in the renowned temples of India.*

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam, President of the organisation thanked Smt Balaraju and the audience for their support and announced that almost $18,000 had been collected from that day's concert and would be equally divided between both institutions. He said that 1998 was the sixth year of its existence and that it had sent during the last five years over $44,000 to Sri Lanka for charitable causes. He welcomed the presentation of the Dance Drama 'Mahabharatha' during the second half and stressed that though Mabhabharatha was an ancient epic, its morals and values were relevant to life today.

Swami Mukthiroopananda of the Ramakrisna Mission, Fiji who was on a visit to Sydney spoke of the ideals of Swami Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and their relevance to life in modern times. He stressed that our treatment of fellow beings was more important than ritualistic worship.

The Dance Drama 'Mahabharatha' depicted the story from the birth of the Pandavas right up to the victory of the Pandavas over the Kauravas. Though it was quite long, it was of a high standard and the entire audience sat enthralled up to the very end.

Jaffna Ramanathan College Old Girls' Association, Sydney: *The Annual Cultural Show and Dinner were held on 31st October 98 for the second time at the Fitzroy Center, Burwood, Sydney. The proceedings commenced with the college daily prayer by Sangeetha Pooshanam Mrs. Kala Gunani followed by the president's speech by Mrs. Punitham Pasupati. The guest speaker Mrs. Puwaneswary Arunachalam spoke about Sir P. Ramanathan, the founder of the college.*

The cultural show commenced with Jalatharangam by Miss Bhavani Mudaliar accompanied by Selvan Janakan Suthanthiraraj on Miruthangam. It was followed by a Barathanatyam recital by Selvan Seran Sripalan and Selvi Rathika Sivapathasundaram. The comperes were Selvi Vaani Harichandra and Sharmila Sivapalakan and the secretary Mrs. Jaya Parameswaran proposed a vote of thanks. The programme ended with the college song followed by a vegetarian lunch.

The event was well attended by the old girls, their families, friends and well wishers of the college.

Vocal & Veena Arangetram of Anusha

Sishya and her Gurus

About six years ago, I attended a concert at the London Murugan Temple, where students of Mathini Sriskandarajah gave a recital of Tamil songs and Anusha Nirmalananthan was one of the participants. She sang **Naan oru vilayaatu bommaiyaa** *very competently, with clear enunciation, control of shruthi and tala. At one point she missed the tala slightly, but like a professional, she let the mirithangist take over for a short period before she continued from where she let off. There was no panic and she was applauded for her presence of mind and control of the situation. I commented at that time that this budding musician would have a good future.*

Anusha had her dual arangetram at the Walthamstow Assembly Hall on 5th September 98 and demonstrated that she had matured into an accomplished artiste. She started the evening with the Navaraagamaaliga varnam which consists of eight parts in janya ragas of melakartas Sankarabaranam, Karaharapriya and Harikamboji and a part in melakarta ragam kalyani. Her ability to bring out the characteristics of the ragas in such a short piece was quite an achievement. This was followed by the Kirtanai **Mahaganapathim** *in Nattai and then one of the pancharatna kirtanais* **Entharo Mahanubavulu** *by Saint Thyagaraja in Sree raga. She continued with Tamil kirtanas* **Thaaye Thripurasundhari** *in Suddha Saveri and Saravanabava ennum in Shanmugapriya.* **Enna thavam seythanai** *in Kaafi and* **Sree chakra raja,** *a ragamaliga were rendered very well. Then followed the lively thillana in Kathanakuthookalam composed by Balamurali Krishna. She concluded with a Thiruppugazh. Anusha was obviously enjoying the evening and the spontanous applause from the audience showed that they too appreciated the concert.*

I was impressed by Anusha's relaxed posture and control of the performance. She did not seem to be intimidated by the accompanying artistes L. Kothandapani, R.N. Prakash, Somasundara Desigar and Sithambaranathan who are leading exponents in their fields in the UK. Her pronunciation, control of pitch and rhythm were all of a high standard. Her Guru Mathini deserves praise for bringing out the musical talents of Anusha.

The second part of the arangetram (veena) was dominated by the Ragam - Thaanam-Pallavi in Kalyani which Anusha played with consummate ease. The other compositions played included **Maathar madappidiyum** *in Ataana,* **Nagumomu** *in abheri,* **Maanasa Sancharare** *in Sama and a Kavadi chindhu. Her vocal talent was revealed again when she accompanied herself on the veena with* **Kanda naal muthalaai** *in Madhuvanthi. The concert ended with the traditional mangalam. Her veena performance was faultless and enjoyed by all. Malini Thanabalasingam, her veena Guru, should be congratulated for all the efforts that had gone into Anusha's splendid performance.*

I would commend the parents Dr. & Mrs. Nimalananthan for their efforts in encouraging British born Anusha to take up Carnatic music. I hope she will continue to learn this art diligently and inspire other youngsters to take an interest in it. The unlimited scope offered by Carnatic music should be exploited to the full by Anusha and I look forward to more performances by her.

Dr. C. Yogachandran.

Parthiban's Miruthanga Arangetram

At the age of 15, Parthiban Nagarajah, a GCSE student of 'The Haberdashers' Aske's School, gave a Miruthanga Arangetram performance to a packed audience in the Beck Theatre, Hayes on 29th August 1998. He had been learning Miruthangam from the well known Guru Sri R.N. Prakash. From a very young age, Parthiban had an aptitude for carnatic music and had learnt vocal music and the violin. He had his violin arangetram with his brother Nirshanthan two years ago. In addition to carnatic music, he also plays the Piano and Western Violin and is in the school orchestra. For such a multi talented prodigy music comes as a way of life.

The Arangetram which is in fact a graduation ceremony for the newly qualifying musician to assume professional standard for subsequent performances was planned with a balanced programme to enable Parthiban to exhibit his skill, knowledge and musical competence for public scrutiny. Maturity, experience and self confidence are the sine-qua-non for accompanying an eminent musician. Sri Balaji Shankar, who had rigorous training under Sangeetha Kalanidhi (late) D.K. Jayaraman and Sangeetha Kalanidhi D.K. Pattammal was invited to perform in this Arangetram, to enable Parthiban to accompany and prove his ability to the satisfaction of a demanding audience.

The concert commenced with 'Varnam' to set the standard and tempo. Since Parthiban had acquired knowledge in carnatic vocal he had no difficulty in accompanying the famous artiste with ease and confidence. Dexterity in the use of fingers stimulates the Miruthangam to produce a rhythmic sound to support and synchronise with the musician's voice. Here Parthiban's role was commendable. In 'Dudukugala nanne dora' in Gowla Ragam, a Pancharatna Kriti, he demonstrated conclusively his ability to accompany a top musician. Similarly the various songs chosen for the occasion gave Parthiban a chance to handle and exhibit in different Thalams such as Adi, Rupaka, Mishra Chapu and Kanda Chapu. After 'Bhajare Re Chittha' in Kalyani Ragam, the Thani Avarthanam played by Parthiban along with Sri R.R. Prathab on the Gadam was commendable. Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi was well done. The concert concluded with a Thillana and Thiruppugal amidst a thunderous applause.

Dr. John Wigley, the Chief Guest from the staff of Parthiban's school conveyed the best wishes of the staff and said that from his personal knowledge of Parthiban for four years he is hardworking, well behaved, polite and a confident public speaker and had passed his GCSE in electronics with an A, a difficult grade only obtained by less than 4% of students. He congratulated Parthiban's success at such a young age and appreciated the support and encouragement of his parents Dr. & Mrs. Nagarajah. Dr. Lakshmi Jayan, the guest of honour and Parthiban's violin Guru referred to the confidence with which he played the Miruthangam and his enjoying the rhythm and thalam with the Gadam player while playing the 'Thani Avathanam'. She congratulated Guru Prakash for his painstaking efforts and dedication in training Parthiban to such a high standard. Parthiban's former Guru Sri Muthu Sivarajah was honoured and he spoke very highly of his performance.*

Parthiban's brother Nirshanthan accompanied on the violin and eleven year old Maithili, Parthiban's younger sister, currently learning vocal music, veena and Bharathanatyam accompanied on the Thambura and conveyed to the audience the mutual support and solidarity among the members of the family.

An excellent evening leaving everybody with a word of praise for Parthiban's performance.

Dr. S. Dandapani.

Nala Dhamayanthi - A Dance Drama

Every year around August and September, art lovers in London are treated to a feast of arangetrams. The arangetrams tend to be used as social occasions for meeting and greeting and at times the standards are far from satisfactory. Amidst these arangetrams it was a bold venture on the part of the Luxmi Art Centre to stage a full length Dance Drama, 'Nala - Dhamayanthi' to a packed audience at the Beck Theatre on 5.9.98 with a cast of nearly fifty dancers. Although the story is well known and has been produced as a Dance Drama by various teachers, this version in the Kalakshetra style was very creative and refreshing. The main characters were dancers who had graduated from the Centre. Although all the dancers did their parts well, special mention should be made of Natasha Karunakaran as Nala for her bhava, Shobana Balaratnam as Dhamayanthi for her grace and Suresh Swaminathan as Saniswaran for his vigour.

The choreography and Nattuvangam was by Smt Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan, the director of the Art Centre, the music composition and vocal was by Smt Ambika Thamotheram and the other accompanists were Mridangam - Sri S.K. Bhavani Shankar, Violin - Sri B.K. Chandrasekar, Veena - Smt Renuka Srianand and Sitar & Tabla - Sri Sarangan Sri Ranganathan. The programme was presented by Sri K. Sanguhan.

On the whole it was an entertaining evening and let us hope that there will be many more Dance Dramas produced by other institutions as well in the future.

Deepa.

Can Anyone of you help us!

The whereabouts of our dearest daughter **Pragashini Paramesh** (also known as Kanna) whose photograph appears above and who travelled from London City Airport and landed at 9.30pm on 21.10.98 at Munchen Gladbach Airport in Germany are unknown and driven us to great anxiety and distress. She had no boy friends and had no intentions of marriage and was only worried during the last two years that she had not secured employment in keeping with her educational qualifications. We are musicians from Trincomalee in Sri Lanka and are resident in Germany. We shall be immensely grateful for any information about her to our address or telephone number or that of the German police.

Mr. M.P. Paramesh & Mrs. Malini Paramesh,
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